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WERE CONSPICUOUS.



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Preface

THE First Series of "Sermons, Literary and Scientific," having in some places met with much approval, is a sufficient warrant for proceeding with the publication of a Second Series, in the hope that they will meet with more general acceptance. They are at all events offered for examination and candid criticism. They are surely worth being looked into with some degree of serious attention and discernment, a treatment they have not met with in several quarters. The first nine sermons of the Second Series, on subjects bearing upon Eleutherology or The Science of Freedom, were delivered from time to time when the author was much occupied in thinking out the contents of his fourth volume on the Thirty-nine Articles, the subject of which was "Original Sin," and amongst other things, Its Relation to Human Freedom. This is the special subject discussed in these sermons, which indicate some of the trains of thought which fall to be carried out in a more systematic treatment "Of

Free Will," the subject of "The Tenth Article," on which the author is now engaged. Those who have looked with purpose into the First Series of Sermons have generally appreciated the selections from distinguished preachers on the Continent, both French and German, at the end of the volume. Accordingly, at the close of the present Series, a larger and wider selection has been carefully made, having reference, together with others in the previous part of the volume, to the Seasons of the Church Year. A claim is made for more candid criticism, that books of serious import should not be thrown into the shade or neglect by the strange fascination for the multitudinous effusions of fiction or romance, in some cases very bad, in others very trivial. Surely the age should not lose its head or heart, and therewith its higher life, over a plethory of unrealities. If these sermons should contribute even in a small measure to cherish more friendly feelings and strengthen the desire of union amongst the national churches, as well as to freshen and broaden the homiletic productions, both at home and abroad, they will have served a good purpose.

JOSEPH MILLER.

BOLAS MAGNA RECTORY,

August, 1909.

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ELEUTHEROLOGY

OR

THE SCIENCE OF FREEDOM.

I.

The Mystery of Iniquity.

"The mystery of iniquity doth already work."

2 THESSALONIANS ii. 7.

HENRY MORE, one of the more eminent of the Cambridge Platonists, lays down certain characters of a mystery, such as, whilst obscure and recondite, it is still not so utterly hid and intricate as not to be in due measure intelligible, which may be easily discernible in the mystery of ungodliness.

I.

In regard to the origin and continuance of evil and sin in a creation absolutely dependent every moment upon God, what can present a greater enigma?

There is this useful consideration, that, apart from the higher sort of creatures, endowed with personality, capable therefore of closer communion or of lapse and alienation, there could be no express resemblance or direct point of union between the world and a God otherwise indefinitely raised above and superior to it.

One of the salient questions of the philosophy of the day is that of the necessity of evil, as if the issuing from

the abyss of the Absolute or the creation of the world were already a fall, evil—moral alike with physical—attaching to all finitude and limitations in the rational creature. Such is the opinion of those who do not consider the distinctive characteristics of the two sorts of evil.

That it was not necessary for created intelligences to sin is proved by the fact that multitudes of the angelic host persevered in their communion with the Father of spirits; and also by the fact that one at least of the human race was throughout life holy, harmless, without spot of sin.

To suppose that the birth of the soul into the world, and its investment with those material lineaments, by which one created personality is at once differenced and related to another, is a plunge into radical evil, would be to revive the dualistic notion that matter is essentially corrupt, wholly alien and independent of God, since His nature is incompatible with evil and therefore can in no sense be the Author or Maker of it.

Matter is altogether and irresistibly determined by the will of God in those laws of nature which all inert things and irrational creatures spontaneously and passively obey. To rational creatures, to be sure, there is also a holy necessity to obey God's laws, and to seek a closer communion with the heavenly Father, since freedom and superiority to the world can thus be alone maintained; yet obedience in man's case being moral or without constraint, there is presented the awful possibility of a decision to withdraw from holy fellowship with the Source of life.

This self-decision to evil has taken place in every single person of the human family, our Lord Jesus Christ alone excepted. Such is not merely a speculative truth, but a painful fact of personal experience and of the uniform

course of human history. But the exact point at which this original self-decision for evil happened in each case, is one of those obscure and recondite points in the mystery of iniquity that you cannot fathom.

However, to trace sin to the self-determination of the rational creature, is to obviate all supposed necessity attaching to the notion of it in some minds, and to vindicate the holiness of God, it being impossible that evil in any form should have its beginning in or from Him.

To evince that radical evil, otherwise called original sin, did originate in each of your wills, not by necessity, but by a free act of self-decision, presents an insurmountable difficulty, since that first act whereby you sold or gave yourselves over to iniquity precedes or evades your memory or temporal consciousness, for in your earliest recollections of the past you are unable to point to such a primary act of self-determination to withdraw from communion with God as must necessarily have left an ineffaceable impression; and there is the further difficulty of supposing that such terrible consequences for evil should be made to be dependent on the decision of the infant will.

As one way out of the difficulty, revert to the theory of the pre-existence of souls, first propounded by Plato, espoused by Origen in the early Christian centuries, zealously advocated by Henry More and other of the Cambridge Platonists, by Kant and followers of his philosophy, Schelling and others, more recently refurbished by the genius of Julius Müller.

According to this theory, it has been supposed, not without a high degree of probability, that the first act of self-decision to evil, which determined the whole after course of the single life, took place in the sphere of the soul's extra-temporal existence, previous altogether to its

union with the body and its circumscription by those material lineaments by which it attains to a fuller realization of its personality, which, by making objective the limits immanent in itself, must be regarded as an important epoch of unfolding, and a rise to a higher condition.

The Manichæan error of the essential inherency of evil in matter and of sin having its source from contact of the immortal spirit with it, is entirely precluded on the above supposition.

It would be too tedious at present to enter into the respective merits or demerits of the rival systems of the pre-existence of souls and of Creationism so much in favour with the Schoolmen of the Middle Ages, which asserts that the soul of each one, before its union with the flesh, comes straight from the hand of God, which proposition would appear also to present insurmountable difficulties in cases of incest, fornication, adultery, unlawful wedlock, and illegitimacy. That God, however, is the Father of spirits, you know as a fact of Holy Scripture, and therefore you can only attribute your earthly and psychical parts, such as the animal soul with its blind instincts and propensions, to your earthly parents.

Let so much be said in vindication of human responsibility and individual guilt in the case of radical evil, since it is the very likeness of God in created personalities which makes aberration and sin possible, and since a free act of self-decision in the soul's extra-temporal state is sufficient, if it could be verified, to explain the whole after-determination to evil in each one's temporal condition, whether or not it can be reconciled with the Traducian theory or the literal Biblical interpretation of the descent of all spirits by natural generation from Adam.

II.

Now consider how the mystery of iniquity has already worked on the stage of history and how it works at the present time.

It had its beginning in the self-decision of a part of the angelic host to depart or lapse from the fellowship of God. The influence of superior evil intelligences in abusing the understanding and seducing the more uncertain affections and frailer wills of mankind is prominently set forth in Holy Scripture.

So perverting has been the seductions of evil spirits that with estrangement from God the spiritual life of man has been merged in that which is natural, and men everywhere have loved and served the creature more than the Creator. "The prince of the powers of the air has worked in the children of disobedience" with an indefatigable and terrible potency of evil.

The worship of the dark, brute, demoniacal forces of nature, and the impersonation of the malignant and destructive elements in human life in the ancient Jewish Church, betrayed the utter depravity and corruption to which man had sunk.

The poet's representation is a literal reproduction of the facts of Old Testament history. The rebel angels "roaming to seek their prey on earth durst fix their seats long after their apostacy next to the seat of God, their altars by His altar; gods adored amongst the nations round," Moloch and Peor, Baal and Astarte, Thammuz and Rimmon, Belial and the brute deities of Egypt, "durst abide Jehovah thundering out of Zion, throned between the cherubim; yea, often placed within His sanctuary itself their shrines, abominations, and

with cursed things His holy rites and solemn feasts profaned, and with their darkness durst affront His light."

If the mystery of iniquity worked not in the idolatries which mixed themselves up so fearfully and strangely with the religion of ancient Israel during the closing periods of the Jewish monarchy, where else can you better look for it except in the superstitions and worship of saints, images, relics, crucifixes, angels, and the Blessed Virgin, which intruded themselves into Christendom during the dark and middle ages of the Church? Paganism was then exhibited under a Christian form in the house of God. The Bishop of Rome made claim to infallibility and other prerogatives of the Most High, and was regarded by his fond votaries as little short of a god on earth. The very bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist became objects of adoration. The Jewish pantheon of the days of Manasseh or Zedekiah, in the worship of the signs of the Zodiac, or in devotions to the rising sun, or in adoration to the fire king, or in prayer and sacrifice offered to the brute deities of Egypt, hardly surpassed in extravagance the maryolatry and saint worship, and fetichism of Christian devotion in the pre-Reformation age.

The pride, pretensions, and gross licentiousness of many of the Roman pontiffs, together with claims of miracles put forth at various ages, has by many been regarded as one of the forms of the manifestation of Antichrist.

It rests with each of you to consider how far St. Paul's description in the passage before you finds an illustration and comment in this particular distortion of Christianity.

For what else does the apostle mean by "the man

of sin, the son of perdition who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God showing himself that he is God?"

But you must look elsewhere also for the manifestation of the mystery of ungodliness in other forms.

Self-deification of the human spirit takes place amongst two other classes of very contrasted character, (1) the honest mystic or mistaken enthusiast or fanatic; and (2) the rationalistic monist sceptic or infidel who is a god to himself.

1. It were tedious to recall to mind the numerous fanatical spirits who in different ages of the Christian Church from Dositheus or Simon Magus downward have given themselves out as the express delegates of heaven, and have made pretensions for authority by new revelations to inaugurate the reign of love, or the age of the Holy Ghost.

One of the most imposing phenomena of this kind in the early centuries was the rise and astounding popularity and spread of Montanism with its pretensions to prophecy, to which the fervent spirit of Tertullian for a time attached credit.

In post-Reformation times the Familists are cited by Henry More as good representatives of this form of the working of the mystery of iniquity. The enthusiastical founder of their sect, H. Nicholas of Amsterdam, professed to be the apostle of love, by whom the mystical deification of man was to be effected. As is usual in such cases, he magnified himself and his teaching above Moses, John the Baptist, and Christ. His service of love was the sounding of the last trump, the descent of the New Jerusalem, the glorious coming of Christ to

judgment. In his wild allegorizing of the facts of redemption, Christ was regarded as only a subjective frame of spirit or divine condition, communicated to all the pious. The reign of Christ was perpetuated in Henry Nicholas and in the succession of the Familists.

2. But the most extraordinary arrogance of the religious spirit in our day has taken quite a different shape, in accommodation to the deeper science and philosophy that is abroad.

Evil works after all manner of deceivableness, and accordingly the theory of identity by which the apotheosis of nature and humanity is proclaimed, opens to you a fresh chapter in the working of the great mystery of iniquity, which proves wonderfully seductive to many of the more highly cultured of our time.

To deny personality, and to merge moral evil in that which is metaphysical, that is, to make it a necessity of finitude or of the limitations of creaturely being, is, in fact, to deny the existence of sin altogether.

If the operation of man's will be but one of the higher forms of the Divine causation, what is usually regarded as sin and guilt in the individual consciousness, vanishes altogether from the standpoint of the Absolute.

Nature and grace are identical on such a scheme, since the Divine will is alone really operative, the human will being merely a form of God's working.

At creation you emerge from the unity of the Absolute into the region of the phenomenal, individual, and finite life. Such constitutes the fall and evil of temporal existence. The Absolute life manifests itself variously in the contrasts of human experience and history, and in due time reabsorbs into itself the individual lives, which are like mere bubbles on the boundless ocean, insignificant pegs in the vast machine

of the universe, whose pervading and animating soul is God.

Such is the awful profanity of the pantheistic philosophy which deprives you of a personal God, and nullifies or explains away the facts of redemption, making each one a god and redeemer to himself, depriving you of the most cherished attributes of personality, representing your self-consciousness and freedom as modes of the infinite essence, which works in and through all things and creatures.

Such is the most imposing form the mystery of iniquity now assumes. We shall not at present say anything of the practical aspects of extenuation and apology that it holds out to the fashionable follies and immoralities of the age, similar in its corrupting and destructive influence to the current deistical adage of the eighteenth century, "private vices are public benefits," there being really no longer any sin and guilt in the world, and no future punishment to be dreaded.

II.

The Absolute Causality of God in its Relation to the Existence of Evil and Human Freedom.

"I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness : I make peace and create evil : I the Lord do all these things."

ISAIAH xlv. 6, 7.

I.

WESTERN people are not in much danger of forgetting the truth here expressed, however much some of them may misunderstand it.

But in Eastern countries it was much forgotten, and is so to this day. In Isaiah's time the dualistic religions of the surrounding nations had found considerable acceptance amongst the Jews. King Ahaz, in special, had introduced the worship of Rimmon from Damascus, and other religious notions and usages from Nineveh. Altars were erected on the flat roofs of the houses in Jerusalem to burn incense to the lights of heaven, and to keep alive the sacred fire, which was regarded with superstitious reverence. Fire worship was one of the recognized and purer forms of the religious devotion of that age. But along with the homage paid to light and to the other benignant powers of Nature, it was usual to regard with trembling horror the dark and malignant influences which appeared everywhere at work. Inert, unconscious matter, too, was conceived to be the seat of a demoniacal,

supernatural energy, everlastingly independent and directly antagonistic to the good and happy principle, whose malignity it was an important point to avert by all sorts of superstitious practices. Dualistic beliefs thus involved a dualism of worship and of sacred rites.

It was in direct reference to such divided service, and the awful distraction of spirit it necessarily occasioned, that the prophet drew the attention of his contemporaries to the very first principle of all true religious beliefs, to wit, the absolute unity and the supreme causality of God. However contrasted the phenomena of Nature, however discordant the energies of human life, whatever dark or malignant influences may manifest themselves in Nature or in history, they could all be explained on other than the dualistic principle of an eternal evil power resident in brute matter. Indeed, the supposition of two eternal and self-existent kingdoms, the one of evil, the other of good, everlastingly at war, is self-contradictory, and is itself the best proof of the perversion and degradation of the human mind. To the unbiassed intellect the truth which Isaiah expresses, however difficult it may be to reconcile it with the wide spread of both physical and moral evil, approves itself on the ground of the absolute causality of God.

II.

God's supreme power and sovereignty, a fundamental fact of Holy Scripture, recommends itself to the religious consciousness, being conformable to the highest dictates of reason, yet, on the same ground, you cannot ascribe to Him anything around you or in you disparaging or naught, to the Divine character. Absolute holiness and love are essential to the conception of God. It does,

therefore, at first sight, seem rather puzzling when you come across such passages as "I the Lord make peace and create evil," however conclusive they are against every form of the dualistic hypothesis.

The creation of evil here predicated of God must, somehow or other, be reconcilable with His infinite holiness. Evil undoubtedly exists with a view to the more illustrious manifestation of that holiness. The creation of it, therefore, will resolve itself into a Divine permission, with a view to greater good being brought about. But it is impossible to disguise the difficulty that on such a supposition of subserviency to good, evil would, in a sense, be no longer evil—a dangerous conclusion, to be shrunk from.

The permission of evil and the coincident limitation of the Divine omnipotence was a consequence of the creation of creaturely personality. The love of God could not rest satisfied with the impersonal creation, with the mere passivity of the brute beasts, although they bore on them the stamp of the Divine ideas. He longed for creatures capable of the intelligent and free reciprocation of His love. Therefore He breathed into man's nostrils the breath of life, who henceforth became a living soul, endowed with the Divine attributes of self-consciousness and self-determination. In this very nobility of freedom lay the possibility and the permission of evil, if man so willed it.

The permission of evil on the part of God, therefore, implies a certain voluntary limitation of His absolute power and causality, which the rather magnifies than lessens His omnipotence in over-ruling for good the endless complexities and disorders arising from the wayward and devious conduct of countless numbers and contrasted characters of free agents. Such is all, I

apprehend, that can be meant of the creation of evil predicated of Him.

Doubtless the Lord made all things for Himself, yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. The fact of the absolute causation of all things by Him cannot be inconsistent with that other fact of His willing the limitation of sovereign and infinite power on one aspect of it by which He permits the existence of evil in the universe, whilst He illustrates the more the resources of His infinite Almighty in the course of providence and redemption to the ultimate most absolute demonstration of His infinite holiness and love.

III.

The existence of evil in creatures, whose very being is absolutely dependent on the will of God, is the greatest enigma of human life and of history. We may not hope perfectly to explain the riddle. Still, one or two considerations over and above that already insisted on will serve to show how far it is explicable on the principles of Christian theism, and the conclusions hitherto arrived at in regard to the most wise, holy, and good character of God.

You cannot explain away evil on any principle of necessity, as if it were universally incident to all finite existences, as if the original issuing of the world from the abyss of the absolute were in itself an evil. But moral evil, at all events, or sin, is regarded by you with altogether different feelings from physical evil, or the other natural or metaphysical limitations or imperfections with which you are encompassed, because to the former you attach blame. You feel that although it has its source in your very self, yet it is the deepest

perversion of your being, what ought not to be, a fact of your inner self involving guilt for which you singly are responsible, which ought not to continue, which you have, therefore, power to eschew and to put away.

But whilst on the supposition of necessity sin would be no sin, and guilt would be resolved into a mere subjective illusion, having no objective reality in God's sight, being ordained by Himself, yet so much truth is wont to be mixed up with this error as to make it acceptable and current in many quarters, as when, for example, it is resolved into the mere preponderance of the sensuous consciousness and the proportionate weakness of what has been called the God-consciousness in the individual development, or that of the race. Men necessarily sin because in their growth the spiritual consciousness does not keep pace with nor preserve its relation of superiority or ascendancy over the sensuous consciousness. All that, therefore, is required is a fuller measure of the consciousness of God, whereby man's sovereignty over himself and the world may be achieved and his freedom vindicated; and this communication has taken place once for all in Christ Jesus, out of whose fulness you all receive.

One palpable good end subserved by the permission of evil is the clearer knowledge and appreciation imparted by contrast. The passage before you is suggestive of this train of moral reflection, everything being the better understood and illustrated from its opposite—light from darkness, sweet from bitter, good from evil.

This subject finds apt illustrations in the sphere of art. The finest pictures have their most brilliant colours and most striking features reflected from a dark background. What, too, would epic or tragic poetry be without the manifold complications and entanglements

into which its characters are brought by the working of their several ruling passions or habitual principles of action, whether good or bad ?

It is a matter of common remark—perhaps it is a fact of the observation and consciousness of most of you—that a regenerate person feels the exquisite sweetness of holiness, and is the more ravished by the contemplation of the infinite righteousness and love of God, in proportion as aforetime he had been experienced in the ways of evil, and an abandoned votary of worldliness. The confirmed slave of sin, when restored to liberty by the grace and spirit of Christ, knows, as only he can know, the unspeakable joys of emancipation and freedom. Thus, on the dark background of vice, the bright characters, whether of Divine or human excellence, are the better illustrated.

Another good purpose subserved by the existence of evil is the stimulus or incentive to virtuous exertion which its pain or uneasiness occasions, and this is a circumstance most trenchantly put forward by those who rest satisfiedly complacent with a merely privative or negative conception of sin. Considering the feeling of guilt to be a subjective illusion, they nevertheless recognize the wise arrangement of Providence in making such a feeling of restlessness or discord, it may be poignancy of sorrow and remorse, one of the most potent levers of virtuous energy and growth of character.

But sin within and moral evil without are no illusions but real facts, perversions of your true being, abnormal moods, which ought not merely to be put an end to, but which ought never to have been at all, the coping with which and conquering, is one of the great businesses of your life, to which you are called in the providence of God.

This positive character of the Christian profession was understood better in the more primitive ages of the Church, when faith was purer and less sophisticated by the presumptuous meddling of philosophy, and it is still brought before you from your tenderest years in that incomparable summary of Christian divinity, the Catechism of your Book of Common Prayer.

When you are told that one of your cardinal duties as a son of God is to renounce the devil, his pride, malice and lies; the pomps and vanities of life, and all sinful concupiscence; that you must fight manfully under Christ's banner against all your carnal and ghostly enemies, and continue His faithful soldier and servant unto your life's end, there is no longer ground for those negative views of sin that have been gaining so much public recognition of late years.

It is apparent that temptation and danger call for circumspection and vigilance; that difficulties rouse your courage, and excite your skill and industry; that hindrances of whatever character from within or from without stimulate to untold exertions; that this is a most valuable part of your schooling in the gymnasium of the world, for the cultivation of the virtues and development of noble character. It is at least seen that evil subserves this desirable purpose.

Again, it has been said that the sins and the consequent miseries of single persons have, in the wise providence of God, been made conducive to the prosperity, the benefit and happiness of society, and of mankind in the aggregate, just as examples made of notorious delinquents are wont to have a salutary influence on others who are naturally inclined to the same evils. That is true within certain limitations and cautions, though in principle it resembles the

infamous maxim that "individual vices are public benefits," which formed the ground-work of one of the most scandalous of the many scandalous deistic productions of the eighteenth century.

IV.

In conclusion. The supreme benefit which accrues to you from the existence of moral evil or sin is the work of redemption which it occasioned.

Your nature was so thoroughly perverted, your inner discord so complete, your departure from God so unqualified, the wound of all your faculties so deadly, that hardly any capacity remained in yourselves of recovery.

In order to redemption you required to be renewed to the deepest root and inmost fibre of your being. You needed to be made new creatures.

And, first, to heal the wound of your conscience, and to remove the burden of guilt which pressed heavily, of which you could in no sort of way divest yourselves, Jesus Christ took upon Himself your sins and died—the Just for the unjust.

Secondly, the plenitude at once of the Divine love and holiness, the absolute power and wisdom of God, so illustriously exhibited in the Cross of Christ, towards which goal the whole course of prophecy and previous history of the race looked forward, has cured the wound of your ignorance.

Thirdly, the wound of your affections, to wit, selfishness, sometimes called concupiscence or worldliness, is remedied by the soul being placed in direct personal relationship of communion and sonship, the love of God

in Christ being fulfilled, or having its perfect work in your heart.

Fourthly, the wound of the will, bondage or slavery to the world gets its cure from communication in ample measure of the Spirit of holiness, which is the Spirit of freedom, to the advent of which blessed Paraclete and Comforter you are wont, on Whit Sunday, to direct your attention at much greater length.

III.

The Divine Ideal Marred, or the Christian Theodicy.

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour."

2 TIMOTHY ii. 20.

THE Church in a narrower sense, the world in a wider, is in Scripture set forth under the figure of a house.

In one of the Lord's parables the master of the house is represented as going abroad and trusting his household to his domestics or responsible persons. Such is precisely your position, since for the time present you have been left here in charge.

In the parable the servants are represented as utterly ungrateful and corrupt, so that wickedness became rampant in the heritage of God, which is a true picture as (1) of the world, so (2) of the Jewish Church in the time of Christ, and as such taken at once by the rulers of it, who saw themselves fairly pictured out.

But in another parable you are presented with a more hopeful picture, since two of those to whom the household is entrusted improve and multiply the talents committed to their care, whilst only one proves unfaithful.

You have here a suitable illustration of St. Paul's words now before you, where vessels of gold and of silver are set over against those of wood and of earth, both forming part of the household.

I.

Two diametrically opposite characters are set forth under these figures. Elsewhere you have "vessels of mercy" and "vessels of wrath."

The patent and broad facts of human life and of the world, as it at present is, are plainly indicated, since men come under one or other of the notations good or bad—not as if any explanation is here suggested of the ground of the difference, as if from the fact of the world or the Church being God's house, the distinction in question were of Divine ordainment.

The distinct teaching of Holy Scripture is that evil is in no sort necessary, and does not at all enter into the Divine ideal, the future realization of which will be consummated by the purgation of all evil from the Church or kingdom of God. To obtain a true conception of the Divine ideal of the world you must represent to yourselves, either the condition of things previous to the fall, from such notices as may be gathered out of the inspired word; or endeavour to anticipate in imagination the new order of things, when sin shall be done away. The fond memories of the Eden of the infancy of the race answer to the brilliant expectations and well-grounded hopes of a humanity consummated and made blessed in a Paradise to come.

That God made man perfect is a fundamental position of revelation. That the redemption which the Son of God accomplished, and which is now in process of

realization in the hearts and experiences of believers, and will eventuate in the restoration and integrity of a lapsed humanity is no less a Christian truth.

If God, then, be the avowed enemy of all evil ; if the scheme of redemption and the economy of the Spirit be designed to put an end to sin ; if the Son of God must reign till He hath put all enemies under His feet, the evil in the world can have no other source than the perverse inclinations, as (1) of the rebel angels, so (2) of men, and the misuse of that glorious endowment of freedom of action or conscious self-determination, which, when normal, closely resembles you to God, so far at least as the finiteness of your nature will permit ; but having become abnormal is the fruitful source of all wickedness, and transforms you into the children of the evil one.

Mankind having been created a vessel of honour did not continue such. The gold of human nature became dim, and the most fine gold changed through sin ; which is the true explanation why in the world now there are so many "vessels of wood and of earth," instruments unhappily to the detriment of humanity and to their own dishonour.

Having premised so much as to the ground of the two great classes of human character, I beg to draw your attention briefly to a consideration of practical moment, which may enable you to judge to which class you belong, and may guide you in your future decisions and course of action. In the voyage of life you need a sure compass, else how are you to make way amidst the darkness and the billows ?

Man may be described as having two centres ; round either one or other his whole being and energies may circle.

The wicked man makes self the centre of life, and this is the case of the majority from the fall, downward. Some form of worldliness or other becomes engrossing. Look abroad upon society. Take a survey of the various motives which form the springs of human activity; you will find selfishness at work under manifold guises, whether love of pleasure, or covetousness, or ambition, or pride, or active malice. If a man's habitual centre be the world and self, his nature must necessarily be conformed and assimilated to the earthly character of the objects of his desires. He becomes a "vessel of wood or of earth." Dishonour and wretchedness are his portion.

If, on the other hand, a man from deliberate preference turns away from self and fixes his heart on God, a complete revolution is effected in his inner being. All his outward relationships become transformed and ennobled. The spirit of a new life is begotten in him. Loving God with his whole soul and affections, and reasoning or intellectual power—since devotion and piety are the reflex of intelligence—he will love his neighbour in whom he sees reflected the image and likeness of God. The love of God will be perfected in him, which being productive of holiness and other good fruits, will present a creaturely reflex of Divine excellence. The image of God being once more restored, the man has become a "vessel of gold," sanctified and meet for the Master's use. Honour and happiness are his portion.

Such is the *rationale* of good and evil in the world. At the fall, the current of man's being was turned away from God, and became concentrated on the world and self, whence has sprung all the discords of his inner being, and the manifold disorders and unhappiness of his individual and social life.

How thankful you should be for the knowledge of this truth, since it furnishes you with a guiding star or magnet, to direct your course through the intricacies of life, and the darkness that should otherwise enshroud your higher being.

Until this truth be clearly apprehended you must necessarily be lost amidst the entanglements of error. Your life revolves in a wrong orbit. Utter perversion and miscalculation enters into all your reasoning and pursuits.

The happy results of the discovery of this truth to a bewildered world may be compared to the revolution in the science of astronomy by the investigations of Copernicus. As, before his time, the world was regarded as the fixed centre of the universe, round which sun and planets with their several satellites revolved, and all other movements and appearances in the heavens were explained on that hypothesis; and the whole was believed to find support in the religious beliefs of the previous long centuries, whilst all the time it was nothing but a congeries of misapprehensions and mistakes; so a like revolution was effected in the moral world when the great truth of revelation and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ became fully apprehended, and God was declared to be the centre, and His love the supreme and normal principle of man's life.

As a fact, then, the Divine ideal of the world has been marred by self-seeking on the part of men. But whereas the idea of sin is irksome, filling them with humbling opinions of themselves, and making them apprehensive of wrath; seeing that in reality there never was a necessity of sinning, but rather a moral necessity in the opposite direction, a necessity of love and obedience: to avoid such unpleasant thoughts and to shirk responsibility

in the matter of the moral evils in which they find themselves involved, they have recourse to certain subtleties and plausible sophisms whereby evil is altogether explained away, or being considered in its mere subserviency to good, is regarded as a necessary part of the present constitution of things, and so in itself good.

II.

In considering, therefore, the world as it actually is, the advocates of the necessity of evil sometimes take high religious ground, as when, for example, God is said to make the wicked for the day of evil; that is, for the manifestation of His most righteous justice, as if His infinite holiness could not be adequately declared apart from the reprobation of the godless.

An optimist vindication of the necessity of evil is based on the ground of giving occasion for such a glorious exhibition of redemptive power, the omnipotence of Divine grace being supposed not otherwise capable of being so well unfolded and grasped by the finite apprehension.

Perhaps the most plausible aspect of the necessity of evil arises from the fact of its being made subservient to the discipline and moral progress of the race, and so, all evils duly considered, the present is the best of all possible worlds.

The contrasts of individual life offer a further explanation. The rivalry and conflict, however, which goes on in the arena of man's activity as well as in the whole sphere of the world's history, it must be remembered, forms no part of the original scheme of things, but is altogether incident to man's fallen condition wherein one disorder is made corrective of another according to the all-wise over-ruling providence of God.

That labour is an evil is apparent from its being a part of the curse pronounced on the sin of the first parents of the human family, but being counteractive of greater apparent evils, it turns into a blessing.

The seeking your private good would be an evil, if, according to the merciful divine ordainment, it were not made coincident with the public benefit, whether or not you had at all willed or had any such reference.

Your energies ought, be sure, to be devoted to the greatest good and happiness of the larger number, but even whilst you eagerly run after your private advantage, God designs greater issues, so that the most hostile and conflicting forces are made to conspire to the general well-being. Thus strife or rivalry being in itself an evil, is productive of good.

War, a necessary evil in a corrupt world, awakens the moral and intellectual energies of nations, shakes them out of carnal security or confidence in worldly possessions, and in many cases is the scourge of lawlessness and wrong.

But so thoroughly has evil penetrated to the inmost recesses of your nature and perverted its highest and noblest relationships, that you can hardly form an estimate of what moral development in a perfectly upright community or paradisaic condition would be.

Doubtless the virtues springing out of love to God are sufficient to employ all your best affections and noblest energies, without any of the accidental stimulus presented by the opposition of evil.

If evil were a necessary stimulus to virtuous activity it would be no longer evil, since good on this supposition would have no life or incentive apart from it. What, then, would become of your belief in the sinlessness of the Saviour, since being perfect man, He experienced all

the normal contrasts of individual life to which you are subject, and was limited and circumscribed at the successive stages of His life just as you are ?

What, too, of the bliss of the redeemed in heaven, where you must suppose the exclusion of all contrasts of evil, and where the individual life must be perfect without any necessity of such contrasts ?

What of the bliss of God Himself, in whom is the fulness of life, and replete fruition of happiness without any shade of evil !

And on the other hand, if evil in this life were a necessary background of good, or consisted in mere limitation of faculty, that is, in finiteness, then the perfection and bliss of heaven must consist in the absence of all metaphysical and moral imperfections whatsoever, and in the absorption of the creaturely and individual existence into the Divine essence in which is no shadow ; an extravagance of pantheistic thought which is somehow congenial to our time.

Now the perfectly happy and normal life is that of love. Each one, however limited his capacity, who fills up his particular place in society and the world, may be made perfect in love according to the language of the apostle. At least, such is the final destiny of the redeemed in heaven, who will certainly, according to Scripture, retain the distinctive features of their individuality throughout the endless ages of eternity, and will be nothing the less perfect according to the proportion and capacity of creaturely existence.

To lose your individuality at the last by absorption into God, would amount to a total annihilation or extinction of creaturely being ; an idea which receives no sanction from the word of God.

IV.

Determinism and Indeterminism, or the Christian Freedom.

"The truth shall make you free."

ST. JOHN viii. 32.

ST. JOHN here implies that before the reception of the truth you are not free.

I.

Let me, in the first place, direct your attention to the theory of indeterminism, which is prevalent amongst the unreflective. It is a common impression that men are free every moment of their lives to choose good or evil; that whatever course of conduct they may pursue they are conscious that they might have done otherwise.

To have something in virtue of which they can please and delight themselves in whatever manner they choose is regarded as a merciful compensation for the manifold restrictions and limitations of their condition.

It will, however, be found, on examination, that there is no such thing as a perfect equipoise of the self between good and evil, so that a man is free to make choice of the one or of the other indifferently.

Such an atomistic theory of human liberty, that is,

perfect indifference of the self towards its objects, which therefore delight because they are chosen, not only ignores the essential difference between those objects and the unconditional claims of moral law, but leaves out of calculation the power of habits and the determining influence of character.

It is evident that on such a theory of freedom there could be no security of the man of the most perfect virtue continuing for one day or one hour longer in his rectitude, or for the holy angels before the throne persisting in their steadfastness.

All the laboured machinery, too, of education and discourse, whereby you usually endeavour to impress the hearts and to stir the wills of men for good would, on such a supposition, be ineffectual, since a state of equipoise and indeterminism is thought essential to liberty, though the presentation of ideas to their understanding might to a certain extent influence their judgment, and destroy their equipoise.

An universal mistrust would arise amongst men in their intercourse and dealings with one another, if the self were so capricious that no dependence could be placed on the estimate they form of the character of one another, and there could be no foresight from a knowledge of each one's ruling principle and motive of the way they were likely to act in any given circumstances.

Further, in the exercise of such an unrestrained and unqualified freedom man would no longer stand in need of redemption, because he claims for himself perfect liberty at any moment to abstain from evil and to follow out what is good to the furthest stretch of his capacity.

Such is the first superficial view of freedom with

which some men take up, and it gets systematic form amongst those professedly Christian bodies who are distinguished for their strong rationalistic proclivities, and are deficient in that deep reflectiveness and insight which is required for a due appreciation of the profounder verities of revealed religion.

II.

Turn your attention, in the second place, to the theory of determinism, the other extreme of error on this subject, which men engrossed with the study of the natural sciences readily fall into, unwittingly providing the vicious and criminal with an argument for the excuse or the extenuation of their guilt. They are the advocates of heredity and pure empiricism, who deny the freedom of the self altogether.

According to this form of conception, human character is a mere natural product, man's spiritual nature a higher form of organized matter, his self the bloom and fruitage of finite causality, his whole capacity and energies fast bound by the inexorable laws of a stern necessity, each successive stage of development being the inevitable issue of that which preceded.

There is no doubt that, to a certain extent, you are the creatures of circumstances. This is more apparent in the earlier part of life, before the intelligent and deliberate assertion of your personality, that is, before the self-conscious exercise of freedom. It is a matter of habitual observation how much your nature is moulded by domestic influences, home example and precept, the instruction you get at school, the tone of the circle in which you move, the nationality or other social and moral forces at work around you. You instinctively

imbibe your most cherished sentiments. Your life, to a very large extent, is regulated by those maxims, whether good or bad, which having been strongly impressed upon you at a tender age, and habitually acted on, form as it were an unconditional law of obedience from which you feel that you cannot well free yourself.

Undoubtedly there is such a conservative principle at work in the formation and unfolding of character, whereby the continuity of it is preserved, and the various germs attain their normal or abnormal growth and maturity according to fixed order and law, outward circumstances contributing considerably thereto. The basis of nature, corporeal and psychical, with its inborn talents and disposition, with special peculiarities of temperament and idiosyncrasy, however, is always the main factor—as of personal identity, so of growth of character.

It is plain that if the self-conscious exercise of freedom were the highest outcome of the causality of nature, and therefore a mere illusion, we should be the passive tools or puppets of an over-ruling necessity, and all real feeling of accountability and guilt would be precluded; a comfortable conclusion to the vicious and abandoned, with which, I do not doubt, they too frequently put up.

III.

Side by side with the conservative principle in the development of character may be observed in all men a principle of progress, whose operation each may easily observe in himself, a strong element of self-dependence or spring of individual energy, whereby, notably at the successive epochs of each one's history, new and unthought-of influences and forces are evolved from your

inner self, by virtue of which striking changes and unexpected reformations or transformations of character and disposition are brought about. Thus, by adopting a new course of action, other habits are gradually formed, and a deliverance is effected from former habits, which, if continued in, might have gained a perfectly tyrannous power.

In the passage before you, St. John implies a state of slavery side by side with a capacity of freedom.

Perhaps in nothing is the fact of this slavery or determinism of the self by external and abnormal forces, which form no part of yourselves in the pure and essential ideality of your nature, more remarkable than in the universal prevalence and conquering power of radical evil, when not effectually resisted and overcome by Divine grace. Original sin, which is alien to your true selves, and which, in your better moments, you renounce as an enemy and intruder, has spread itself like a rank and luxuriant creeper into all the branches of human energy, whereby every virtuous and godly capacity is liable to be choked and crushed out. Its thorough perverting power is shown in total alienation, if not in positive hatred to God, and in a corresponding and vain confidence and dependence on self and on the world. Herein precisely consists your loss of freedom or slavery.

To those whose moral and religious consciousness has been awakened to apprehend the portentous objective manifestations of sin in human life and in the history of the world, all tending to death and destruction, and to feel the subjective energy of selfishness, whether in the form of pride, or of malice, or of unbelief, or of concupiscence, exercising a tyrannous influence over all their thoughts and activity, emancipation must

appear a very difficult, although a most imperative and urgent matter.

Such a conviction, if real, is a great occasion of congratulation, since it shows that the self is not altogether bound and tied with the chains of sin, but that prevenient grace is at work in the heart, setting in operation new energies which, being fostered and developed, are likely to eventuate in a thorough renewal and sanctification of the character and life.

In order to an induced and confirmed habit of holiness, a new basis of nature must be acquired. This is freely provided for you in Christ Jesus. The effectual grace of God in the heart is the absolute turning point in the individual history, without which all mere movements of the progressive and formative energy of the self, which never extend beyond outward superficial reform, are essentially ineffectual, but with which all good fruits and godly unfolding of character are to be looked for.

In St. Paul's language "the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" must be put off; all germs of evil development must be destroyed. You must be "renewed in the spirit of your mind." The ideal of holiness, or the image of Christ, must be enshrined in your inmost heart. The love of God must rule there, and the spirit of holiness find an abiding presence.

When such is the case, then, and not till then, all those methods whereby the convinced person struggled after restoration will be found useful helps to a life of holiness and of an immediate fellowship with God, wherein alone the true liberty of the creature can be realized.

The new convert cannot safely dispense with any

available aids toward his progress and steadfastness, but he must not attach any merit to the exercise of such aids, foolishly turning what is a useful mean to an end in itself.

A wise disposition and filling up of time with profitable avocations or innocent and needful recreation, cherishing throughout a habitual spirit of prayer, and dependence upon God, besides stated self-examination and calling yourselves to account as in God's sight, an unconditional surrender or self-dedication of yourselves, repeated after every discovered shortcoming, will assuredly help you to mature your Christian character, and to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ and His truth makes you free.

V.

Freedom through Christ.

"If the Son therefore make you free ye shall be free indeed."

ST. JOHN viii. 36.

WE are commonly said to live in an age of freedom. If self-assertion be freedom, the allegation is true, for there is no more marked feature of this age and country.

But it is evident there may be excessive and wrongly directed self-assertion; and in that case, what ought to be the greatest good—to wit, the fullest unfolding of your normal individuality—is turned to evil.

There are two classes in which this wrongly directed self-assertion is broadly apparent to the most heedless observer: first, the pronounced profligate or abandoned worldling; and, secondly, the scientific infidel or rationalist.

There are, besides, in the Church self-assertionists who make obtrusive profession of Christian doctrine, who claim for themselves such a liberty or power of self-determination as to supersede the necessity of redemption, because if each one of his own will and pleasure could at any moment turn from sin to God

and bring forth answerable fruits, there would be no need of extraneous supernatural helps.

The self is free thus far, that whatever may be the course of conduct which a man pursues, he ever feels that he might have done otherwise; but this does not necessarily imply such an arbitrariness of action, that the habitual disposition, the more cherished motives or actual character of the person, does not in every case—it may be unconsciously—really enter into and shape his decision.

You ought to be ready to accept whatever may be true in the opposite systems of imperfect or half-truths, to either of which, in so very mysterious and incomprehensible a subject, the human intellect is continually tending—to wit, arbitrary freedom or atomism of self on the one hand, and its absolute determination or predestination on the other, which, together toned down and squared by the level of Holy Scripture, should constitute the whole truth.

There is not a man, however depraved, who does not feel that he is free in his actions, and who accordingly does not either blame or accuse himself, and search about for extenuations of his faults, or experience satisfaction and self-approval, as the case may be. But, on the other hand, there is not any one who is not less or more moulded by his previous history and the associations and surroundings in the midst of which he has been brought up or is now placed. The question is, How much is he free? And, how much determined?

The successive stages of human life are never altogether disconnected. There is no broken link in the individual history, but undeviating continuity, every moment emerging out of that which preceded, evolving

latent energies. The deepest germs of character are unfolded in the course of organic growth, and fostered by the conservative principle which preserves the unbroken unity of each single life amidst the multiplicity of its attachments and activities, amidst the successive and striking changes and vicissitudes through which it passes in its earthly history.

But there is no doubt also of the inscrutable and inexhaustible energy of the progressive principle or self-formative power at work amidst that wonderful machinery of motives, preferences or interests which environs it, and which it ever and anon seeks to shape and control.

This relative self-dependence or independence of all other inward or outward forces strikingly shows itself at certain epochs in individual development, such as the transition of boyhood into manhood, or other turning points of personal history, though this self-originating energy of thought or motion is never absolute, except, it may be, in the case of regeneration or renewal by the grace of God, when it and all other things become new, the old having passed away.

The self-formative energy is very apparent from the way in which you go about shaping your own character and course of life, since so much at least has to a large extent been entrusted to you. For how do you usually shape your character? Is it not by the formation of habits? And are not habits formed by repeated acts? Does not every successive act of virtue confirm the habit and strengthen the character? The upward course is ever more strenuous, as being in opposition to the natural bent or depravity of the human heart, and accordingly man's higher freedom is in proportion to the measure of self-emancipation from the chains of sin,

observable in the striking reformation of character which takes place from time to time in the case of one or other in the circle of your acquaintance.

But remember such a measure of self-dependence or power of individual determination is relative and cannot attain its full issue or exercise apart from the grace of God. Without redemption from the guilt and power of sin, and thorough renewal and regeneration, all other reformation, however plausible, must be little more than skin-deep. Still, the manifestation of it in the mere externals of a man's life indicates his capacity for a profounder and more complete emancipation.

You have just to look at the picture presented to you in this part of the Gospel to see how short a way all merely outward reformation goes. For were not the Pharisees, to whom our Lord was speaking, most exemplary, even in their religious and most solemn observances? Were they not regarded as models of piety, and revered as masters in Divine knowledge? Did they not inherit and treasure the holiest traditions, and feel pride and enthusiasm in being sons of Abraham? Did they not boast that they had never been in bondage to any man? It never once occurred to them that they yet required to be made free. They were therefore astounded at our Lord's train of reasoning and discourse.

For did He not plainly insinuate their need of freedom? Had they not strange misgivings since they straightway took His remarks to themselves? And what did He mean by the self-evident proposition, "He who doeth sin is the servant or slave of sin," if not to occasion serious reflection and produce self-conviction in their minds?

The subtler forms of sin, such as religious pride, are

certainly more delusive if not more self-perverting than any other. The religious life of that day was encrusted with sanctimoniousness and formalism. The shell was there without the kernel. They had the form without the power of godliness. In short, they were the slaves of the pious prejudices and conceits which their system of human tradition was well calculated to cherish. That they were fast bound by chains of the subtler forms of sin appeared in their continuing proof against the liberating power of Divine grace, and their exasperation and deadly malice against Him who came on the express errand of conferring on them the highest freedom.

Your danger, too, beloved, is from the subtler forms of sin, since the grosser sorts are too palpable to deceive any one. The slavery of the confirmed drunkard or abandoned profligate is pronounced enough, though even they in the midst of their vicious courses, which they cannot forego, have a deceptive feeling of freedom.

But if you had not the example of our Lord's persecutors, you might have the more difficulty in realizing the fact that even the most pronouncedly religious persons are not uncommonly the slaves of envy, malice, and detraction; that hatred of truth in its pure nakedness and severity becomes a ruling element in their lives; so that oftentimes when men think themselves freest, the darlings of providence, they are the more enslaved. Their very consciousness of freedom not unfrequently seems to seal the more securely their immoral bondage, the necessity of sinning having grown insensibly upon them.

The Lord in the passage now before you points out the source of real freedom, to wit, the truth of God. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you

free." Himself was the full impersonation or embodiment of the truth. The further proposition is a deduction from the same thought, "If the Son therefore make you free, then are ye free indeed."

At best, previous to redemption and renewal, you are bound and tied with the chains of the subtler if not of the grosser sins. Even after that absolute crisis or epoch of your Christian history has taken place, you are sore "let and hindered" by the power of indwelling corruption. Concupiscence, which is of the nature of sin, is never thoroughly overcome in this life, having grown in the course of sinful development into portentous magnitude from the first motion of selfishness or original sin in the infant breast, which original act of sin, committed, it may be, in a pretemporal existence, at all events previous to your recollection, has exercised a determining influence over all the later issues and activities of the individual life until arrested, and radically changed by the grace of God.

"The perfect law of liberty" is the will of God, accordance with which is secured in the gospel or good news of Christ Jesus, since you are freed from the bondage of guilt through His atonement, and are again reinstated into a condition of sonship and enlargement, the principle of obedience or the love of God, the fruitful germ of all virtue and creaturely excellence being implanted in your heart.

Self-dependence or freedom or superiority to the world and its entanglements is thus experienced in the realization of Divine love, and the maintenance of fellowship, as with the Almighty so with the community of the faithful, through a habitual spirit of prayer and sympathetic intercourse with one another, which assures your future progress and sanctification in the life of God.

I shall conclude with one other Scripture reference whereby the nature of real freedom will be further apparent. "Being made free from sin ye became the servants of righteousness." Again, "Being made free from sin and become servants of God, ye have your fruit unto holiness and the end everlasting life."

VI.

Evolution Confuted.—I.

“Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

HEBREWS xi. 3.

OF late years you have heard much of the evolution theory of creation.

If it were always kept in mind that evolution is a mere theory or hypothesis, put forth to explain the facts of existence, as far as possible, but bound to stand or fall as tested and verified by the facts themselves, as all other hypotheses are, there would be comparatively small danger from it.

But the truth is, the theory is put forth as science before it has been verified and proved. Its advocates, however, so far admit that “further discoveries are to be looked for,” until their position can be finally established. Therefore such assertions, “that the eminent men of science who are now in opposition to Darwinianism may be counted on the fingers of one hand,” and that “the rising school of thought is almost unanimously in favour of evolution,” if they can pretend at all to be fair statements, and not the fond illusions of a votary, are certainly proof of the popularity of the hypothesis,

but not necessarily of its truth. Other hypotheses as plausible have had their day, and passed away like forgotten dreams.

The theory, indeed, is an illustration of the principle that the human understanding cannot dispense with hypothesis in the search and investigation of truth. "Kepler made nineteen hypotheses respecting the planetary orbits, and abandoned them the one after the other till he settled on the elliptical form, which, on verification, proved correct, and was then no longer an hypothesis."

Whatever boast some scientific men may make of the Newtonian formula, *hypotheses non fingo* ("I make no hypotheses"), theory has been found indispensable in the process of discovery, and it has yet to be seen whether evolution does not justly take a place amongst "the idols of the theatre," that is, theories founded on too narrow a basis of experiment and natural history, or too broad and sweeping inferences from a few inadequately ascertained facts.

The theory does not necessarily deny the existence and providence of God, as has generally been admitted of late years, whatever its tendency may be, and its tendency does appear atheistical enough to many reflective and devout minds, since it is essential to the notion of it that all things and beings are linked together in an unbroken chain of sequence, and are a continuous series of transmissions of one primitive push, every higher order growing out of a less perfect one, according to such so-called fixed laws as "natural selection," "continuance of the fittest," and so forth, which, however, yet require to be verified; that from the chemical and electrical forces inherent in matter the more rudimentary organisms, vegetable or animal,

were produced. This, the so-called "spontaneous generation" of the evolutionist, is as wonderful as the creations of the enchanter's wand, or the fiction of the poet that the lion and other animals spring forth, full-formed, out of the womb of Mother Earth; that from this primary cell all the later developments of plant and animal life have been the successive evolutions.

But, in the first place, with all the acuteness and eagerness of observation and experiment; with all the manifold appliances of chemical, electrical, and other mechanical forces, the idea of spontaneous generation is as far as ever from being established as a fact. The creation of a simple cell from brute matter is likely to defy for ever the utmost efforts of a pretentious science, and until this is done the theory must break down at the outset. The assertion that the simplest organism can grow spontaneously from properties inherent in material atoms or inorganic substances has to be made good else all is over with the theory, and it must henceforth be regarded as one of those curious "idols of the theatre" which have for a short time awakened the interest, amused the fancy, and countenanced the materialism and voluptuousness of a fast age.

But not only is the link between unorganized and organic matter yet to be established, the candid observer of the facts of true science, who is not biased by the plausibilities of an apparently rigorous scientific theory which would fondly be believed in, must admit that it is not at the beginning, or in one or two other places only, where wide gaps present themselves in the pretendedly unbroken chain or series of evolution, but there are gaps or missing links throughout; that both

in the animal and vegetable worlds there are typical forms of classes and genera so fundamentally unlike in structure that *à priori* a transition from one to the other is an utter impossibility. An exogenous plant, for example, is so radically different from an endogen or an acrogen, from its very seed-lobe through all the stages of subsequent growth, internal structure of the root, stem, leaves, together with the number and arrangement of the parts of the flower and fruit, that it requires a greater stretch of faith than is usual amongst savants in higher matters, to swallow the idea of evolution or natural transition of the one from the other. And so, the typical forms, that is, the homologues and analogues, to use scientific terms, of the great classes of the animal kingdom, present such fundamental contrasts, that the idea, for example, of the radiate type of the coral polype or sea anemone passing into the curved and spiral form of the mollusca, or that again into the ringed or articulated arrangement of the parts in the crustacea or insects, and finally, the tremendous leap from the articulate to the vertebrate structure, on the supposition of a natural and spontaneous process, are all so marvellous in their way, and so astounding an exhibition of an almighty power supposed to be lodged in Nature, as to exceed in wonder the most extraordinary exhibitions of supernatural and Divine force on the stage of revelation, that the mythical genius of a David Strauss would appear to have been the better and more appropriately exercised upon it.

Now, what are the facts of science, as disclosed in the geological record? Do you not find these widely distinctive types of organized being to make their appearance of a sudden at certain definite stages in the formation of the earth's crust, which may be termed so

many creative epochs, without the slightest substantial proofs of intermediate types, the isolated cases usually brought forward being of the most obscure and unreliable character? The idea, for example, of the amphioxus, instanced in being a transition between the spiral or curved type of the mollusca on the one hand, and the imperfectly vertebrated or cartilaginous fishes of the old red sandstone on the other, is to be regarded as the fond conceit of a votary; whilst the supposition that the archæopteryx was a pterodactyl, or transition between the reptile and bird, and not itself a true bird, has now been universally abandoned.

The facts of the case are these: In the earliest sedimentary or stratified rocks, forming the crust of our globe, of which the Silurian of our Cambrian hills presents some of the upper strata of the more primary system, you have the first appearance of the radiate and annulated types, as in the corals and trilobites of that age. In the epoch of the formation of the old red sandstone of Devonshire and Monmouth, of the centre and the north of Scotland, there is a sudden and amazing production of vertebrate fishes, forms with buckler-shaped heads, with spiny appendages on their sides, and encased by a corselet of bony scales. In the succeeding age of the coalfields and mountain limestone, the cellular thallogens of the more primitive rocks is supplemented by the vascular type of the acrogen, which in luxuriant forests of tree-ferns and huge equisitæ formed by submergence, or by drifting into estuaries, our present coalfields, endless stores of fuel for the various economies of life. The palæozoic age passed away, and in the new red sandstone you come upon fresh and higher creations, the earlier of the mesozoic forms, huge frog-like creatures,

of which there are numerous footprints, thirty species of birds, some larger than the ostrich, and the earliest traces of mammalian life, the microlestes, or little robber.

It were a long story to tell of the other successive creations, as that of the saurians of the lias, and the insect life of the upper oolite, from thence to pass to the neozoic epoch and describe the tapir and elephantine forms of the tertiary rocks, a distinct creation on the earth's surface, disconnected with all previous forms of life, the link being missing all through.

Now, it is evident that such facts of science are quite in agreement with the statements of the Revealed Word. It is a schoolboy remark that "the Bible is not a manual of science." The youngest nowadays is taught so much. But what we have reason to expect is, that the truths of Scripture, clothed in the plainest and most homely words, in order to be easily understood by the humblest and most unlettered, should not conflict, as they do not, with the facts which science brings to light. The book of nature may in nothing contradict the book of revelation, since they are the production of the same Supreme Intelligence. Actual successive creations, answerable to the Bible account, have been established by geological science, whilst the pretensions of evolution meet with the faintest and most uncertain corroboration, which cannot for a moment stand the test of candid and unbiased scrutiny. What though these creative epochs, each thousands of years apart, are described as successive days' work in Holy Scripture, did not the requirement of the infantile or naïve intelligence demand it? Such form of statement could be easily understood, whilst scientific propositions would have been above primitive man's powers of apprehension. His

relation to God and the world had to be expressed in the simplest language.

Instead of the world being conceived of as a machine (such is the most flattering construction of which the evolution theory is capable), perfectly adjusted at the first and furnished with all needful inherent seeds and energies, to work itself out in the successive developments and stages of its long history, like a watch wound up and left to go of itself after a pre-established order, according to fixed laws of evolution and growth; geological facts, on the other hand, reveal to you a God ever present and operative, holding all things in His hand, guarding and governing His works every moment, giving fresh impulse by a succession of new creations, as the ages roll on; and when untold time had been spent in making the world such a glorious and suitable dwelling-place, furnished with abundant stores of materials for comfort and convenience, creating man as lord of the world, in form "so express and admirable," exercising dominion over all the other works of the Divine hands, and being in the attributes of intelligence and will, fashioned in the very image and likeness of God. None of the creatures before him in the successive creations exhibited or could exhibit those features of personality, self-consciousness and self-determination which make him, in his normal condition, a faithful mirror and reflection of the personality of God.

What, on the evolutionary hypothesis, can you make of the fact of history that when man is left to himself, or deprived of the light of revelation, he speedily and inevitably degenerates? Instead of steadily progressing, he retrogrades into a condition of naturalism or savage life. Whilst longer periods than the Biblical chronology are required by the evolutionist for the measure of

improvement mankind has now attained, have you not witnessed of late years that under the fostering influences of an enlightened Christianity, the present stage might have been reached long ago had mankind been as receptive of the regenerating and ennobling impulses of the Spirit of God as they have been in recent times ?

VII.

Evolution Confuted.—II.

"Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear."

HEBREWS XI. 3.

THE word in this passage, "æons," translated "worlds," may be more happily rendered "ages."

I.

The Jewish writers were wont to speak of "the present age," or Old Testament times, in contradistinction to "the coming age," or the days of the Messiah. You read in St. Paul's Epistles of "the mystery which has been hid from ages" (æons), from which and other passages you learn that there have been more than one age previous to that of the gospel.

The covenant of promise made the age of Noah or that of Abraham very different from the age of Moses, or that previous to the fall of man; whereas the age of the prophets differed from the others in important respects.

But the main thing to be kept in view is, that all these successive ages were prepared and constituted by the Word of God. You have the meeting-point of them all in Him. This is the most vital principle in all the

inspired writings, that God's Son, who, in these last days, that is, the gospel age, hath spoken unto us, has invariably been the medium through whom the Father of all made the worlds, or ages.

This Son of God remaineth ever, "the same yesterday, and to-day," the only Mediator in governing and communicating revelations from God to man, from the beginning to the end of time. His Spirit, which was in the prophets, did testify of Him.

II.

It is thus seen in what relation the Son of God, or "The Word," stands to pre-historic times, or those geological epochs which make so many successive creative ages in the earth's history.

Following up remarks in the previous sermon, I beg to point out some of the more invaluable truths of which evolution, the most fashionable form of modern infidelity, would deprive you; I mean evolution divested of those quasi-religious aspects which it sometimes assumes, as if a reconciliation of its statements with the special facts of Christian revelation were possible.

If the theory be capable of a religious construction at all, it must call to its aid the hylozoic system of the Stoics, or the modern monism or pantheism, which identifies God with nature, as some poetic and popular forms of philosophy have always done. If God be regarded as an impersonal force inherent in matter, and attaining self-consciousness in man, a power will indeed have been presented, adequate to all the requirements of the evolution theory, but, at the same time, the apotheosis or deification of the world and of man will have been effected.

That the material atom, out of which, by a process of spontaneous generation, the primary animal or vegetable cell is supposed to have been produced, contains the fruitful germ of all after developments of the organism, of sense, of intellect, and of emotion, is an atheistic system of long standing, and is not the less atheistic that this hidden omnific power has been dignified in the hylozoic systems of the universe with the pompous title, "The Soul of the World," quite poetic and beautiful, in its way.

Now, if man, in the course of untold ages, have by successive steps been developed according to the fixed laws of the evolutionist, such as "natural selection," "survival of the fittest," and so forth, he is the mere product of nature, or of the divine plastic force supposed to be inherent in matter, just as plants or other animals only with fuller complement and higher intensity of intellective and active energy, but not differing in kind.

We are upon this hypothesis presented with a grand panorama of impossible sequences; organized matter springing spontaneously from inorganic; the most diverse typical forms derived, the one from the other, according to a magical process of transmutation, which no one can explain whosoever imagines it; last of all, man, emerging from the platform of the ape into the first stage of personal existence, that of the savage or cannibal. The more sottish in this wild state die out; the stronger types survive, and form, it may be, a tribe of hunters; from which a pastoral condition is by and by entered on. Next succeeds the discovery of metals and their application to economic uses in the mechanical arts, the cultivation of the soil, the building of cities, and the formation of civic communities.

One age succeeds another, according to fixed laws of development of natural forces. The flint epoch in time

gives place to the bronze age. That, again, is supplemented by the age of iron. If a golden age be at all contemplated in the theory, it lies at the very end of the series, in the remote future. We are now passing through the silver, or transition, period. There has been no such starting-point as has been generally received from the very genesis of the Church, but directly the reverse. There is no golden age at the beginning of human history to answer to the paradise at its close. The Bible is, forsooth, either obsolete or mythical and highly poetical. The early paradise, a dream of the imagination! But how do they account for all nations dreaming the same dream, since the tradition of a primitive golden age is universal?

III.

Now see, briefly, what results from this theory.

1. In the first place, the evolutionist must resolve moral evil into physical infirmity, the finiteness or privation of necessary power and knowledge. The painful sense of imperfection is universal. Failure is incident to the limitations which hedge in our being by a dark, inexorable destiny. But man cannot blame himself for metaphysical faults, and the preponderant strength of mere sensuous impulses. He lives according to his higher instincts, but is withal acutely sensible of his helplessness. He cannot impute sin and guilt to disabilities, whether of physical or intellectual structure and condition over which he has no control. Errors which bring loss and grief are mere imprudences which violate self-love or utility, the highest factor of whatever moral theory evolution may be capable. In the offices of friendship, partnership, or other co-operation in business,

it is still his own benefit or gratification at which he aims, and if at any time he sacrifice a lesser good, it is in prospect of a greater, the coming short of which produces feelings of dissatisfaction and self-reproach, which is the only moral evil of which he is conscious.

2. Note, in the second place, that the theory of evolution is a congenial and flattering rule for the strong to regulate themselves by, since it virtually becomes a maxim with them that "might is right," by the divine order of things. Such a concentration of selfishness is diametrically opposed to the spirit of the Christian religion, which breathes infinite compassion towards the poor and weak, besides bending all its efforts to the restoration of the erring and perishing.

A simile has been drawn from nature which aptly illustrates this theory. For, just as a majestic oak throws its shadow over a wide area, and draws to itself the main sap and nutritive juices of the earth around, thus depriving of the sun's light and heat, and of their proper nourishment, the countless flowers, herbs, and other plants which grow in its shade, so it is amongst men in an abnormal or un-Christian condition. The mighty in this world sacrifice to their lust and ambition, it may be, myriads of their fellow-creatures; whilst on the opposite principle, God chooses the ignoble and weak to confound the wise and the strong.

To use another figure, drawn from the presumptions of evolution itself. Just as in the past history of the world, nature has ever selected the strongest and best of each species for preservation amidst the wreck of multitudinous weaker and less perfect forms, so a similar struggle for existence and continuance must now necessarily go on. In the fight for self-aggrandisement and permanence, each need not be too scrupulous as to the

means of which he may make use, and thus there arises from a principle of selfishness so insidiously taught a war of man against his fellows. With the watchword, "the survival of the fittest," it is easily seen what a wide door is opened for grasping covetousness and wrongous violence.

3. In the third place, whatever scheme for the improvement and the progress of the race the theory may prescribe is from without. To provide the most favourable conditions of development, ameliorate the social surroundings of the creature. Domesticate him comfortably as you would do a pet dog or horse. Let wealth abound, and multiply the means of repose from toil. Let a wise legislature diffuse plenty and contentment amongst all classes of the community. Let education enlighten the mind, refine the taste, improve the manners. Let the maxims of prudence and utility gain ground and become the sovereign motives of human action. Let sanitary reform do its work in the prevention of disease and the alleviation of suffering. Let the marvels of science and art increasingly intensify and brighten life. Let the secrecies of nature yield up their richest treasures. All such accessories of human existence, however good and valuable in themselves, do not touch the heart of man or move the deepest springs of affection, do not renew the whole spirit and life. Instead of raising you above the world, they too often make you the more dependent and enslaved to it.

It is indispensable to the theory that man's character and life be the mere product of outward forces; that his destiny be moulded by heredity, by education, by social usages, by domesticity, by church associations, by nationality, by historical tradition, by companionship

and calling in life, all which of themselves make you slaves to habit and conventionalism.

4. It is apparent that whatever formal freedom you may have on such a one-sided estimate, wherewith to delight yourselves, yet real freedom you cannot have, apart from the unfolding and growth of personality. Real freedom you can only realize properly by a life above the world, maintained by direct fellowship with the Source of life. Man's superiority to the world is alone to be found in personal communion with a personal God, with willing self-surrender and obedience to His holy will. That is a conception altogether precluded by any consistent theory of evolution.

If man have in and of himself progressive impulses, and be placed in favourable circumstances for attaining the aims and end of personality, what need of a special revelation from the Most High, or of the laborious and cumbrous machinery of redemption? If he be not guilty, what need of so costly an atonement? Why came the eternal Son of God on earth to suffer and die, the Just for the unjust? If man be the plaything of chance, or the tool of a merciless destiny, why did the Holy Spirit descend from the heaven of heavens to revive and quicken the highest factors of your personality? Why beget that spirit of adoption, whereby you are brought into most direct relationship with the Father of spirits, in which relationship consists your real freedom and superiority to the world?

The personality of God is thus an idea utterly beyond the mental compass of the evolutionist, and accordingly he cannot have right views of human personality, the human in its normal or renewed state reflecting the Divine as in a mirror. The grand doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood is an unknown quantity in his way of

thinking. Suppose he take up with the notion of a great soul of the universe, then all things and creatures are manifestations of it. Men are its higher apotheoses or impersonations. Extension and thought, however manifested, are attributes of an underlying essence, which pervades, and in fact is identical with, the substance of the world.

With no personal God, a Hearer and Answerer of prayer; with no Father of men and angels; with no Maker of all things visible and invisible; with no Redeemer and ransom or atonement for the guilt of sin; with no sanctifying Spirit conveying to you the spirit of sonship and of liberty; with no responsibility, immortality, future judgment, and the restitution of all things; with a blank annihilation in prospect, man were no better than the beast which perishes, his destiny after death no higher than to be manure for the ground.

What a grand and imposing theory, that, amongst the most distinguished scientific men of the day, its opponents should be said to be "counted on the fingers of one hand!"

VIII.

The Crown of Freedom.

"Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set Him over the works of Thy hands," etc.

HEBREWS ii. 7.

A PART from the great events which you celebrate during the first half of the Church year, you could very inadequately understand or appreciate these words.

But for the crowning facts of redemption, what a meagre conception could any one form of your real freedom, the glory and honour of humanity.

I.

The scientist, whilst fully cognisant of the insignificance of man in view of the immensity of creation, yet glories in the possession of an intelligence which indefinitely differences him from all other creatures upon earth, as well as elevates him above all physical and mathematical magnitudes.

The moralist loves to expatiate on conscience, the germ of a full-blown consciousness of God, and the relative dignity, the superiority or subordination of all the other active principles or affections of the human constitution.

The poet delights to observe in the very mien and bearing of man "so express and admirable" an indication of "godlike" excellence, by which epithet Homer is wont to characterize his heroes.

II.

But, beloved, you ordinarily live amongst the mere wrecks and ruins of humanity, so that at best apart from the gospel and its blessed truths you can apprehend only the shreds and relics of its normal and inherent greatness.

You are precluded from forming a just estimate of man's glory and real freedom which reason unaided by revelation could attain, because you cannot know how much religious traditions may have been propagated from the common origin of the race amongst all its branches and generations.

There can be no doubt that whatever noble and worthy representations of the Divine character and attributes, and of man's likeness thereto, may be met with in the literature of Deism, for example, are mere reflex rays from the positive doctrines of Christianity which yet it would seek to supplant or set aside.

The supreme end of true religion, is the restoration of the Divine likeness in humanity, which end has been realized in various manners and degrees in different ages and amongst peoples of contrasted characters.

You may describe this Divine likeness, to wit, the real freedom and glory of man, as consisting, (1) in a knowledge of God; (2) in communion with Him; (3) in the realization of holiness; and (4) in dominion over the other works of the Divine Hand.

Such was man previous to his fall. But with the

fell ravages of sin the Divine image has been marred or lost. Humanity in its ideal had nigh perished altogether. Corrupt man presented the most wretched caricature of his pristine and normal integrity, so that it was quite impossible from observation or the highest effort of philosophic conception to replace the scattered and distorted rays in one harmonious and graceful picture, much less to reproduce them in the life and character, had not the Son of man been manifested for the very purpose of the restoration of a fallen race, and a supernatural machinery of Divine grace been devised and set at work to bring it about.

III.

In Jesus Christ, therefore, the second Adam, made for you a quickening spirit, you have presented to your wondering and ravished vision the very ideal of humanity which otherwise could not have been restored to you.

1. This ideal is being fulfilled through Him in you. Slowly and gradually, but surely ; firstly, in respect of knowledge, since God the Father has been revealed by Him in all the plenitude and intensity of His most amiable and august attributes, which could not adequately have been known in any other way, according to the inspired saying, "No one knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son chooseth to reveal Him."

2. Communion with God is a second particular of the glory and honour with which man is crowned, but which apart from Christ could no more have been restored to you than the Divine knowledge just now specified. The infallible Teacher has assured you with perfect convincingness of argument that "No one cometh

unto the Father but by Him," to which the utterances of apostles are conformable, that "you are brought nigh to God by the blood of Christ." A spirit of adoption has been begotten in you, so that you have at all times boldness and confidence of access to the Holiest.

3. What shall I say of the feature of righteousness which is a third particular of your ideal? Having been naked you have been clothed upon with the robe of Christ's perfect righteousness. The garments of holiness wherewith your inner selves have been invested are no mere hyperbole or rhetorical figure, seeing that the holiness of the Redeemer is not only imputed but woven into the very warp and woof of your regenerate character. Your one task and duty is to be holy in all manner of conversation and godliness, because without this principle of holiness in your soul and its outcome in your life, there is nothing to render you acceptable in the sight of God, and to make you worthy of heaven at the last. There is nothing else really satisfying to yourselves.

But never forget that the root of this principle of holiness is love. By opening your heart to the love of God in Christ, there wells up a perennial spring of grateful and generous affection, which overflows in love to others, and the fruits of which are the higher forms of moral excellence. Truth, purity, justice, self-sacrifice, in all spheres and activities are the issues of this love to God, which you reciprocate upon the full manifestation of the Father's love to you in the cross of Christ. The law of love which embodies the principle of holiness, and all other forms of moral beauty and goodness, becomes for the Christian unconditional and unqualified, in conformity with which he regains real freedom, or superiority to the world and makes it his slave,

which is another feature of the glory and honour of humanity.

4. In the fourth place, then, the fact that God has put all other things under the feet of man, comes really true nowhere but in the redeemed part of mankind, in which the work of faith and love bears perfect fruit. Outside of redemption men are in bondage to the world, its desires, objects, and pursuits, whatever show and delusive feeling of freedom they may cherish. But "those whom the Son makes free are free indeed," no longer in bondage to the rudiments of the world, but superior to its seductions, so that "neither life nor death, neither things present nor things to come, neither height nor depth, nor any other creature, can separate them" from that love and fellowship with God, wherein real freedom consists.

It is not to be supposed that man in his paradisaical condition exercised miraculous or supernatural powers over the energies of nature or the processes of the material world, since that is the Creator's prerogative. Neither is it likely that in his restored condition, to whatever degree the regenerate and sanctified life may attain, will he ever exercise such power by inherent right and authority. In special cases, for various definite exigencies, it is conceivable that extraordinary gifts of miracle and healing may be conferred as of old, but such cases must necessarily be exceptional, and nothing would appear to call for an exhibition of them in our day or in the present order of things.

It is wonderful, however, what conquests over nature modern science, under the humble and devout guidance of a Christian spirit, has achieved by way of invention and research.

Nothing appears too hard for the sanctified genius

of humanity. It penetrates to the minutest atom or organism of this earth, and revels in the immensity of space. There is nothing either too humble or too lofty for its searching glance. To the child of God all things become new, and he finds in them the transcripts of Divine thought. The world presents a revelation of Deity; and the relative place and use of the things in it are clearly discerned. The conquest of nature in one marked particular is seen in the measure of sanitary reform and medical discovery, whereby disease and epidemic is put to flight and suffering alleviated.

But though man in paradise may not be supposed to have been endowed with an inherent power of miracle, yet he had the gift of immortality and superiority to the powers of death and destruction, a conquest achieved for you by Christ who brings life and immortality again to light, and bestows it on you. The Spirit which raised Him from the dead quickens your mortal bodies by His spiritual indwelling, without which you all most certainly would have perished everlastingly.

The conquest of sin in the heart is the best earnest of your final victory over death. The powers of destruction are being overcome here and now in the life of the regenerate.

IV.

In the passage now before you, "Jesus for the suffering of death was crowned with glory and honour."

So in the hard schooling and discipline of Divine grace, wherein you are wont to conquer by patient endurance, you are purified. You are being made perfect by suffering. "Your way to conquest and eternal life," in the beautiful words of the Prayer-book, "is to

suffer here with Christ, and your door to enter into eternal life is gladly to die with Christ, that you may rise again from death and dwell with Him in everlasting life," the glorious liberty of the sons of God having attained its consummation.

Thus by Christ's resurrection, ascension, and sitting at the right hand of God, a world of light is thrown on the true dignity and destiny of your humanity.

Your kinship to Deity is asserted and vindicated. "You are raised with Christ to the heavenly places." "Your hearts and minds ascend thither." "Your life is hid with Christ in God."

That your humanity has been in the person of Christ so intimately joined to the Divine nature, and now in heaven occupies a position of sovereignty, is the best assurance that you shall also reign with Him at the last.

But whilst He is declared to His wondering and adoring Church to be the Son of God with power by His resurrection and ascension, whilst absent from you in person, it was necessary that He should be with you by His Spirit. And so He sends to you from the throne above another Comforter, the Holy Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, to abide with you for ever, who by making your persons temples of His august presence, effects a more intimate and perfect union between God and man than was possible so long as He was manifested on earth in the local circumscription and limitations of your humanity.

Thus, then, by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon the Church, and His tabernacling in the heart of the believer, the crowning glory has been conferred on your mortal nature. You must not forget the awful responsibility that accrues to you from this supreme gift of Divine love.

If the Holy Ghost were not God, such language could not be used with propriety, since a temple is a house of God appropriated to acts of worship, and you know that adoration or other homage cannot be paid to an impersonal virtue or energy in the very nature of the case, nor to any created being, such as the holiest angel around the throne, without idolatry.

For the same reason the Son claims your highest reverence, being palpably demonstrated to be God and man in His whole office of mediatorship, both in creating and redeeming humanity. It were difficult to say whether the first or the second creation were the more illustrious exercise of His power. Certain it is from the whole scope of revelation that both are His work.

If He were not God you are involved in a contradiction which it is impossible to surmount, to wit, that God by His revelation had most deliberately betrayed you into the crime and guilt of idolatry, than which nothing is more revolting and heinous in His sight.

But whilst man is in Christ indissolubly united with God; and the Holy Spirit, very God of very God, comes from Him and makes you His temple, yet there is no fusion of the natures, no identification of substances so essentially different, that is, your humanity is not swallowed up or merged in Deity, so that you become, as it were, parts of God and objects of worship to yourselves, a profanity of modern pantheistic thought, which was not, however, unknown in ancient times.

IX.

The True Scope and Paramount End of Education—the Good.

“There be many who say, Who will show us any good?”

PSALM iv. 6.

I.

NO saying can be more unquestionable than that good is that which ought to be, and, conversely, that evil is that which ought not to be.

We shall not now dwell on those seductive and delusive theories which regard evil as necessary—an essential part in the constitution of things—conducive to good, without which the world would fall far short of the measure of perfection and happiness now attributed to it.

Such theories are grounded either on the metaphysical imperfections of the creature, or on the contrasts of individual life, or simply on the fact that the struggle with evil calls for the exercise of your higher energies, and that without the disadvantages and difficulties of your present condition your virtue would be apt to slumber in security, there being supposed to be no other so fit opportunity for arduous enterprise or heroic endeavour.

But, however plausible such negative views of evil may be, it will be found, on deeper consideration, to be

altogether incident to the positive disturbance and want of balance which sin has caused ; and upon sin ceasing it would be entirely obviated and done away. You cannot really reconcile yourselves to evil in any shape. Neither reason, nor conscience, nor faith in God will permit you to say that evil in any of its forms is good, or that which ought to be in any relation or sphere of life. On the contrary, you regard it everywhere as an enemy and intruder.

The present entangled and confused scene of human experience, in which often the best gifts are perverted to the foulest uses, wickedness triumphant over virtue, is plainly contrary to your sense of right or moral ideal, and, accordingly, you look forward to the future for a readjustment of existing disorders and the realization of the Divine plan, in which dwelleth righteousness in undisturbed tranquillity, and in the exercise of that superiority and rule which is normally inherent in it.

There can be no doubt that good, in every sense of the word, is the will and intention of God, just as He gathers up in Himself every ray of good, or is Himself the Absolute Good, although through man's sin and guilt manifold entanglements and perplexities have been introduced into the world. You, the short-sighted creatures of a day, may be sometimes led to adopt the language of the psalmist, " Who will show us any good ? "

Note that such is the language not of a few, one here and another there, over-fond and curious inquirers, perplexed with the enigmas of history and painful personal experiences, amongst which the mystery of ungodliness is the crowning puzzle, but it is the many who are here represented as putting the question, the craving for good being universally felt to be an essentially crying need of human nature, without the realization of which

neither reason, nor the conscience, nor the heart can rest satisfied.

II.

Accordingly, good constituting man's ideal—that which ought to be, the fulfilment of the Divine intention—men, from the beginning, have sought to define what it is, and have laid down rules for its acquisition.

It is curious and instructive to review the varying and conflicting opinions that have been entertained of the greatest good by the different schools of thought, and by the highest thinkers in each, who have turned their minds toward this very interesting subject. It may be profitable, because it is reasonable, to expect that some particular feature or other of it would have greater attractiveness and prominence for some minds than others. Each, according to his bent or inclination, would enlarge on those aspects or qualities of the absolute good which touched him most, and filled him with admiration, or otherwise elicited his approval—it may be from the consideration of the practical advantages which followed or attached themselves to each separately.

If, therefore, some placed the good in happiness, and made the pursuit of it the main object of human life, you cannot deny that they aimed and strove after a specific good, since happiness may be called the good of the heart, one part of the Divine intention (1).

If, on the other hand, the Stoic raised his mind to such a pitch of virtue, as utterly to disdain the pleasures of sense, and to seek the higher perfection and good of life in the practice of disinterestedness, in loyalty and devotion to justice and patriotism, to purity and other forms of moral excellence, simply for their own sakes,

you must admit he hit upon a good of the conscience, whose promptings you ought to follow at all hazards, in spite of all desires or inclinations to the contrary (2).

If, again, some were deeply impressed with the delights of knowledge, and felt so intensely the pleasures of intellect as to seek the highest good in literary, scientific, or speculative pursuits, and, accordingly, devoted themselves to them with unqualified assiduity, you readily perceive this to be another important aspect of the subject, and that the order, the method, the design, which the mind investigates and brings to light in all the works of creation, in the economy of the human constitution, in the mechanism of society, or in the ways of God in history, is the good of the reason—that which satisfies and delights it (3).

Or, once more, there have been others of more comprehensive vision, who have surveyed more dispassionately and fairly the scene of life, and have endeavoured to make just estimate of the different goods which manifestly correspond or answer to the various parts or capacities of your manifold nature, denying none, rather assigning each its due place in its scheme or regulative economy or gradation, some goods being of a higher character, in all cases to be preferred when their claims conflict with those of the inferior and subordinate principles (4).

III.

It cannot be denied that this last scheme of a hierarchy of the goods of life is in accordance with Holy Scripture, since it is a fundamental principle of the Christian religion “that every creature of God is good, if it be received with thanksgiving.” Whilst the senses whose exercise is so pleasurable are the inlets of

manifold knowledge; the pleasures of intellect in generalizing and reasoning or making inferences from its perceptions, are of a much higher and more intense description. Again, the delightful emotions, the thrill of exquisite joy which results from the proper exercise of your higher energies, or the sweetnesses of the disinterested affections, benevolence, the love of kindred, compassion to the distressed, loyalty to sovereign and country, make you sensible of some of the high-wrought ends or issues of human life. But of all the more ordinary goods, the highest is the satisfaction of conscience which springs from fulfilment of duty. The sense of praiseworthiness, of merit or good desert, is accompanied with the purest and holiest enjoyments. It raises you above human opinion or the vain love of applause, and makes you exult in the conscious approbation of God.

There is therefore not a faculty or energy of the human constitution which has not its legitimate or normal object or good, the exercise of which, upon that object, is not accompanied with a certain kind and amount of enjoyment, higher happiness resulting from the exercise of the worthier energies, but all forming integral parts of the ideal or Divine plan—that which ought to be in the very nature of things.

Suppose, therefore, for clearness of conception, that you call duty the good of the conscience (1), joy or happiness the good of the heart (2), and order or design the good of the reason (3), how is the Divine intention in regard to these several goods to be effectually brought about in individual and social experience, because if it could be brought about, the perfection and bliss of humanity would be attained.

Note, then, that the moral law is the expression of the highest ideal you can possibly form—(1) prescribing

the conditions of the most perfect order, (2) making clear and explicit the various particulars of your duty, (3) assuring you of supreme happiness upon its fulfilment.

But how to fulfil this moral law, and bring to an end all the manifold disorders and miseries of human life, to extirpate the root and spring of them all, sin and guilt, whatever, in short, ought not to be in this lovely universe of God, becomes the question of supreme moment.

Mark well, all the particular commands and duties of the moral law have been resolved into the principle of love; and whereas love of your neighbour is a mere reflection or form of your love to God, the placing your soul in a right attitude to Him is of primary and indispensable import toward your assuming a proper attitude to everything else.

Thus the culture and growth of the highest factor of your personality, the organ of love or the spirit, that energy of the soul which is turned toward God and has God as its object, becomes your paramount duty.

Conscience, as it reveals in the moral law the august character of the Lawgiver, may be rightly regarded as one mode of your consciousness of God, but this consciousness can only be fully quickened and intensified in presence of the glorious manifestation of the Father's character in the person and work of Christ. The plenitude of moral excellence, as inimitable and attainable by you, is presented in the Cross, the climax of His saving merits, in the contemplation of which your highest enthusiasm and energy of spiritual character is drawn out. The love of God in the grandeur of its magnitude and intensity elicits a reciprocal love in each of your breasts. You are united with the illustrious Sufferer by sympathy. You become, through Him, at

one with your heavenly Father—sons of God with the conscious possession of the feelings, duties, and destiny of sons. The consciousness of God having by such contemplation, that is, the gaze of faith, been kindled into undying vigour, your one duty, which comprises all others, is to walk in love, to be holy and without blame before Him. Habitual communion is maintained through Christ, to which fellowship of the Spirit, the use of the appointed means of grace, prayer, the word, the sacraments, is indispensable.

Love to God, therefore, is the supreme good, inclusive of all other goods, according to what our Lord says in the gospel, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness," and all other excellences will follow the acquisition of it.

Behold, then, (1) the principle of harmony and order of creaturely wills, as with God, so with each other, constituting the good of the reason; (2) the main spring of all virtuous energy, the powerful impulse to practical duties, being called in Scripture, "the fulfilling of the law," and therefore the good of the conscience; and (3) the issue of it, all inner satisfaction and delight, happiness in its very substance, and therefore the good of the heart.

The realization of the good, that which ought to be, from the prolific principle of it, love to God, is the very object of the diffusion of Christian instruction, and of the other machinery of Divine grace at work in the Church of God.

IV.

From these considerations the urgency and necessity of religious instruction will be abundantly apparent,

since without it the true knowledge of God and the attainment of spiritual life, together with the resultant blessing, to wit, the blossom and fruitage of the Spirit's energy, would be an impossibility. Apart from Christian enlightenment, your minds must have continued tossed to and fro, harassed by the delusions of ignorance and the wretched scruples of superstition, or rendered dead and insensible to any spiritual impression, since unconsciousness of God or final estrangement from Him is known in Scripture as spiritual death.

Secularist theories of education, exclusive of the religious element, must necessarily leave the deepest feelings and highest principles and most potent energies of character latent or undeveloped. They may sharpen the intellect, secure quick and accurate perception, acute power of argumentation, cleverness in worldly business, and smart practice, whatever may conduce to the outward advantages of the creature, but man, both in theory and actuality, under such a scheme will remain a machine after all, since according to the science of the secularist human actions are rigorously determined by fixed unalterable laws, and leave no place for the exercise of real freedom. The higher liberty according to him would be subversive of the undeviating laws by which all characters and actions are rigorously moulded and determined.

Foreseeing the dangers of modern secularistic notions, diocesan educational societies were everywhere formed half a century ago, to promote that instruction in the supernatural realities of revealed religion, which will ensure the quickening and keeping alive spiritual life in the rising generation, so as to bring up a God-fearing people, which is the salt and preservative of the national life.

Surely it is of the utmost importance to cherish in human bosoms the feeling of freedom and responsibility, rooted in the faith and fear of God, facts of life which the science of the rigid determinist denies. Without the sense of reconciliation and Divine fellowship which the gospel brings, and the unalloyed reverence and devotion to the will of God which it begets, you would be unable to rise above the world or free yourselves from slavery or entanglement to its interests.

Religious inspection of schools is year by year energetically carried out, so that saving truth is maintained and extended with the happiest result.

You are bound to promote this work, having at heart the highest aims of life; whether in an individual or corporate capacity you all can contribute, each in his own way, according to the degree of moral force you can attain, to the cumulative well-being, and add your little stone to the upbuilding of a strong and great nation.

If the Divine plan is to be realized, and that which ought to be, gain the final ascendancy, it must be by individual and collective repentance, love to God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is the key for national regeneration and restoration of a lapsed humanity.

The best part of Christian philanthropy, therefore, is the diffusion of religious instruction, since nothing is calculated so highly to enlarge, elevate, ennoble the human mind, as certainly nothing else can renew, reform, restore it to the Divine image and likeness, which is the glory of your nature.

All other knowledge is comprised in the knowledge of God, every branch of science being concerned with some or other of the Divine works, on which the ideas,

the wisdom, power, and goodness of the uncreated and absolute Intelligence are stamped, and readily discovered by the devout observer.

The most enlightened patriotism, but also the closest individual interests are concerned in it. Your sons and daughters want to be proficient in Divine knowledge, thoroughly equipped with the truths and principles of Holy Scripture, before they go forth from the sanctity of home into the world and public life, well able to cope with the temptations and wickedness of the age, and to fight manfully their own battle under Christ's banner; that having proved steadfast and exemplary in their respective spheres, and spent their lives to the glory of God and the good of their fellows, they may die in the Divine favour with anticipation of an eternal recompense, the words from the upper sanctuary sounding in their ears, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world," that realm in which that which ought to be everlastingly rules, and that which ought not to be never enters and cannot enter.



THE SEASONS OF THE CHURCH YEAR.

X.

The Word of God : its Imperishable Characteristics.

"When Jehudi had read three or four leaves, Jehoiakim cut the roll with a penknife and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all was consumed."

JEREMIAH xxxvi. 23.

THE roll which Jehoiakim cut up and burned on the charcoal brazier in his winter palace was written by Baruch at the dictation of Jeremiah under the inspiration of God.

The word of Jehovah had come to that prophet, "Take thou the roll of a book and write therein all the words which I have spoken unto thee against Israel and against Judah and against all the nations from the day I first spake unto thee, that is, from the days of Josiah even unto this day."

Jehoiakim thought he had done a very clever thing, quite a stroke of statecraft, in destroying a writing which certainly would have disquieted the minds of his people under the then idolatrous *régime*, inasmuch as it

would have revived in them the higher feelings and aspirations of the national religion.

But the Lord proved that "there is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the Lord," just as has been proved a thousand times before and since.

For after the roll had been burned the word of the Lord came again to Jeremiah, "Take thee another roll and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll."

And so it happened in after ages. The more men sought to suppress or destroy the Word of God, the more it multiplied and waxed great. Take one or two other examples.

I.

Antiochus Epiphanes, B.C. 168, a great conqueror, but in fact a brilliant madman, stormed Jerusalem, plundered the temple of its wealth, carried away the golden candlesticks, together with the altar of incense and other sacred furniture, built an idol altar within the consecrated precincts, and sacrificed swine to those who were no gods. He destroyed the sacred books of the law, and ruthlessly slew those who had copies in their possession.

The Roman Emperor Diocletian, A.D. 303, thought to outdo his predecessors by the unrelenting severity of the persecution of his Christian subjects, and to crown their work by the wholesale destruction of the Word of God and extinction of the true religion. Accordingly he published an edict in every part of his wide dominions which forbade all Christian assemblies, ordered the churches to be pulled down, the sacred writings to

be gathered in and burned, all Christians to be deprived of civic rights—in other words, outlawed and exposed to the brutal fury and rapacity of the multitude.

Throughout the Christian centuries similar devices were resorted to by Papist prelates and princes with the view of prohibiting the spread of the Word of God amongst the people, but the unrelenting severity of persecution, the terrors, tortures, and the stake of the Inquisition, could not prevent the dissemination of the Holy Scriptures, or the translation of them into the spoken languages of Christian peoples, the final issue of which was the glorious Reformation of the sixteenth century and the establishment of the Church in its renewed and Protestant form.

The Word of God in these several great historical incidents, as on lesser occasions, just prevailed all the more in teeth of the virulence and exasperated malignity of its enemies.

II.

It is very interesting, as in the Bible narrative now before you, so elsewhere, to observe the contrasted impressions made by the inspired volume on men of diverse character, and how variously they are influenced by it. It may be listened to with callous hearts; its power of conviction, its melting and persuasive influences may be resisted, as you see in the case of Jehoiakim, who when he heard Jehudi read two or three columns, in a spirit of obduracy born of unbelief cut it in pieces as if it were not God's message at all, or rather just because it was His message, casting the shredded roll on the fire that was on the hearth.

When in Christ's day the blessed Gospel was preached throughout Palestine, the powers of the kingdom of evil were shaken to their very bottom and aroused to the fiercest opposition. Nowhere was embittered malice so hotly cherished as amongst the ecclesiastical princes and dignitaries of the Jewish metropolis of that age.

Saul of Tarsus was animated with a spirit of most rancorous zeal against the preachers of the Gospel. He breathed out uncompromising menace and slaughter, becoming a ready tool of intolerance and inquisition, carrying out the decrees of the Sanhedrim by the excommunication, imprisonment, and death of the disciples of Jesus.

Julian the Apostate, who in his youth had been trained in the severest precepts of the Gospel, unhappily in that exaggerated or perverted form of it, as presented to you now in the asceticism and monachism of the Romish Church, which brought disgust and loathing with it to his mind, on his relapse to paganism and a Stoical philosophy, made great threats that when he should return from the invasion of Persia he should root out the name of the Galilean, and not leave one Christian alive. He would set up the image of Aphrodite or Venus in all the churches. Being, however, in the field of battle, he was pierced in the breast by an arrow as if from heaven. When he pulled it out, and found the wound mortal, he cursed Christ, took a handful of blood and threw it up into the air, exclaiming with his last breath, "Thou, O Galilean, hast conquered."

And so it is everywhere with the natural human heart. It is so to-day amongst us. The haughty spirit resents the admonitions and reproofs of the Word of

God. The severe requirements and superior lustre of the Gospel ideal casts a slight and reproach on the pride and vanity of mere human wisdom too hard to bear.

But there are some with better and purer natures. Even in the court of the weak and wicked Jehoiakim you read that the Princes Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah made intercession with the king not to burn the roll, but he would not hear them.

What a contrast to the conduct of Jehoiakim did not his good father Josiah and his father's courtiers present on the occasion of the discovery of the law which had been lost during the long previous period of idolatry and superstition! You read that when Shaphan the scribe rehearsed the roll which the high-priest Hilkiah had recovered from the débris and rubbish of the Temple, Josiah was deeply affected, rent his clothes in token of contrition, and out of anxiety for his people's safety took immediate steps to avert the wrath of God!

Oh, take heed lest you resemble Jehoiakim and his idolatrous courtiers in slighting the Word of God, or those other persons in the Gospel, to whom the Lord spake in parables for judicial and disciplinary purposes, who seeing saw not and hearing heard not, neither understood, and in whom was fulfilled the prophetic words of Isaiah, which ought to be a timely admonition to all succeeding ages.

III.

Consider to-day some of the more noteworthy characteristics of the Word of God, how much you really owe to it.

First, the world would have remained in darkness without it, since it alone contains the truth of God and prescribes an infallible rule of duty, being "a light to your feet and a lantern to your path."

Christ's glory indeed shines forth illustriously, being from beginning to end the informing spirit of revelation. Behold "the Light of the world," without which a man must necessarily stumble, there being otherwise no light in him!

Without Christ you are dead in trespasses and sins, like a corpse with the last flickerings of spiritual life extinguished. But the call comes with creative energy, from the primal source of life: "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee." St. John says, "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." Here the dead bones come to life.

What the sun is to the natural world the Word of God is to the spiritual. It quickens, regenerates, gladdens, transforms the face of the whole earth.

Look what your country was before the light of the Gospel shone on it. Barbarism prevailed. In Roman times you had a temple where St. Paul's Cathedral in London now stands dedicated to Diana; another on the stance of Westminster Abbey, consecrated to the worship of Apollo; whilst your oak forests, echoing the orgies of druidical solemnities, reeked with the carnage of human victims, sacrificed in the vain hope of propitiating the dark and malignant powers of nature.

In Anglo-Saxon times, before the arrival of the Christian missionaries from Rome, the state of things was even worse, more savage and barbarous. Your forefathers then worshipped the sun and moon, Tuesco,

Wodan, Thor, Fries, and Satur, so many personifications of the brute forces of nature, which in character were as proud, cruel, revengeful, lustful as their worshippers. And from them the names of the days of your week are derived.

Behold in these later days what your land has grown to, in manners, in arts, in the higher amiabilities and humanities of family and of social life, under the bright light and fostering genius of the Gospel!

How apt and beautiful in this connection are the words of George Herbert—

“If still the sun should hide his face,
Thy house would but a dungeon prove,
Thy works night's captives. Oh, let grace
Drop from above!”

Note, secondly, another imperishable benefit of which you would not willingly be deprived.

Christ the Word is described by St. Peter as a sure foundation. He is the living stone, elect, chosen of God, and precious, upon which you, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house.

The members of the Church are, in St. Paul's Epistles, designated “fellow-citizens, of the household of God.” Why? Because they are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Himself being the head corner-stone.”

In another Epistle, the same apostle speaks of them as God's building. “Ye are God's building.” “Other foundation can no man lay, but that which is laid, Christ Jesus.” Whatever, therefore, any one should build upon it, whether gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, the same must be tried by the fire of the Divine judgment.

Christ told His disciples that He would build His Church on the rock of St. Peter's confession, into which brief symbol of faith is gathered up the quintessence or concentrated substance of Christian dogmas.

On another occasion He thus discoursed to His contemporaries: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I shall liken him unto a wise man who built his house upon a rock, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock."

Thus the Word of God will stand for ever. Other systems rise and fall. Kingdoms and empires shrivel up into nothingness, but "there is no knowledge or counsel against the word of the Most High."

"What is the chaff to the wheat?" asks one of the most eloquent and godly of our reformers. "Numa Pompilius, king of the Romans; Lycurgus, king of Lacedæmon; and Minos, king of Crete, were wise men, and of great governance. They devised laws to rule their people and bare them in hand that they were taught by revelation, that so their ordinances might win the more credit and be established for ever. But where are they now? Where is Numa, Minos, or Lycurgus? Where are their books? What has become of their laws? They were unwise in that they had no knowledge or understanding of God. They and their laws are dead, and their names forgotten. The law of God, however, came indeed from heaven. He wrote it with His own finger. It is the fountain of all wisdom, and shall continue for ever."

Thirdly, the Word is a repository of healing medicines for the soul, providing a remedy in diverse forms for the several sorts of spiritual malady.

The psalmist says: "He sent forth His Word and healed them, and delivered them from their destruction."

How pathetic the appeal of the tender-hearted, but deeply desponding and melancholy prophet, Jeremiah. "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why, then, is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?"

Christ is in the New Testament called the Physician and Bishop of souls. The woman who had suffered many things of divers physicians, but was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse, at last found healing virtue accrue to her from faith or spiritual contact with the Good Physician, of which the touch of the hem of His garment was the mere outward indication. "Her faith had made her whole."

What comfort to sinning, suffering humanity in the words, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick!" "Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses."

St. Luke, "the beloved physician," St. Paul's bosom friend and companion in travel, was in due time called to be "an evangelist and physician of the soul." You are taught in the Collect for St. Luke's Day to pray that "by the wholesome medicines of the doctrine delivered by him, all the diseases of our souls may be healed."

Once more, the Word is the food of the soul. The manna in the wilderness was typical of the true bread from heaven which giveth life unto the world. Christ is that Bread of life. Give heed to the warning of the apostle. "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have shared the heavenly gift, and been partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the

good Word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." St. Peter exhorts the younger of you as new-born babes, having already tasted that the Lord is gracious, to desire further supplies of the sincere milk of the Word, to grow thereby unto the comely proportions of the Christian character.

In conclusion, think how desolate and forlorn life would be without the Word. Lacking the means of grace, spiritual life would die out. What greater calamity, then, to your people and country than a famine of the Word!

This famine is threatened by the prophet Amos against a people who will not give ear, and will not obey the will of God. "Behold the days come, saith the Lord, when I shall send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord. The people shall wander from sea to sea; from the north even to the south. They shall run to and fro to seek the Word of God and shall not find it."

To cite a quaint illustration of the learned and godly reformer, already quoted, "When the people of Israel were besieged and wanted food to eat, they fed on vermin of divers sort and many other unwholesome and filthy things. One woman was driven, from sheer hunger, to do a shockingly unnatural and cruel deed. She took her babe, the fruit of her own body, killed it, cut it in pieces, dressed it, and fed upon it; a loathsome and revolting meal, especially for a mother to eat her own child! But she was driven to it by the extremity of famine. It was so bitter to lack that by which life might be preserved. Even so it fared with us and our

forefathers, after it pleased God to take away the gospel and to send a famine of the Word. We were driven to eat those things which were loathsome and horrible, to wit, the husks and inanities of a vile superstition and idolatry. We were constrained to feed upon our own offspring, the phantasies and vanities of our own hearts. There was no substance in them. They could not nourish or save from spiritual starvation and death."

XI.

Catholicism and Protestantism.

"The common salvation."

ST. JUDE 3.

I.

YOU read here that salvation is common or universal, that is Catholic.

From the whole tenor of the Epistle, however, you learn that it is as much an individual or personal matter.

Mark well those two opposite moments or factors of the salvation that Christianity brings to you: (1) union or communion, that is, universalism; and (2) individualism, *i.e.* of personal import.

The names more commonly given to those moments in ordinary conversation are: Catholicism, the principle of which is authority; and Protestantism, the principle of which is individualism or liberty.

Christianity is at once Catholic and Protestant, so much the more really Catholic because it is Protestant and of free spirit.

Behold the attitude of all earnest Christians. Each makes religion a personal concern. Each feels its realness and saving power. The more you do so, you have a more living community of interest and feeling with all others who, in apostolic language, have been called saints.

On the wide platform of Christian life the sincere

Catholic ever finds himself at one with the sincere Protestant.

St. Jude's brief letter is addressed to those who are sanctified by God the Father and preserved in Jesus Christ and called.

A sanctified character and life was the distinguishing feature of the Christians of the Apostolic age. There were then no such unseemly schisms as now unhappily tear the Church asunder, or rend the bowels of Christ.

II.

It is not unusual to hear very intelligent members of this great Protestant Church of England disown the name Protestant and make boast of the apparently more dignified designation Catholic. Now, observe, these appellations have become sect or party names in our day, of which you never hear anything in Holy Scripture.

Note also that one of the primary principles of the Church of God and of our Anglican branch of it is that "no man can be saved by the law or sect which he professeth." Such is the Church's uncompromising protest against causeless divisions. There is this excellent reason for it, because "Holy Scripture doth set forth unto you only the name of Jesus Christ, whereby men must be saved."

The common salvation, therefore, centres in the name and faith of Jesus Christ, and in such subjective frames of mind and outward activity and life as are answerable to it.

"The faith once delivered to the saints" therefore consists in the belief and steadfast adhesion of your hearts to the Lord Jesus with all its accompanying happy consequences and fruits of righteousness.

The apparently hard thing about the eighteenth Article is the damnatory clause: "He shall be accursed, however diligent he may be to frame his life according to that sect or law and light of nature which he professeth."

Observe that you are here in the region of complementary, imperfect or half-truths to be interpreted by counter statements which express the other side of the truth.

Thus, St. Paul lays down the principle that the future judgment of each shall be according to his opportunities. "He that sinneth without law shall be judged without law." Christ also tells you that "of him to whom little is given the less shall be required."

Be sure the Christian faith is spirit and life if it be anything. It is a fundamental principle of the Gospel that whosoever has the earnest purpose or honest resolve to do the will of God according to his knowledge and opportunities, shall follow on to know the Lord, and shall have the inner assurance of his higher consciousness to the truth of the doctrine."

The clause, therefore, in that eighteenth Article, so objectionable to many, just as the corresponding damnatory clauses in the Athanasian Creed are, refers the rather to the wild excesses of the private spirit in those who from vanity and selfishness proudly follow creaturely wisdom and become the deluded votaries of their own devices.

With the lowly, however, the wisdom that is from above deigns to dwell. Those who realize most the rich treasures of grace, the sweet consolations to be found in the Lord Jesus, will have the blessed assurance of the truth, and be the more zealous to impart the same invaluable blessing to others, and anxious to bring them into the same fellowship. To those who have inward convictions and experience, it requires no incentive from

without to lead them, in the interests of unity and godliness, to "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."

Note once more that the Christian faith is primarily an influence and a life. It changes to the core the individual character, and makes new creatures. It regenerates and transforms society in all its relationships. It powerfully bends the wills of men to its sway. It inspires reverence and love, unity and concord. It renews and gladdens the face of the whole earth.

The best authority you have to look to in the Church of God is not so much that of traditional or ceremonial uses or ecclesiasticism, as the uninterrupted succession of saintly lives in its history, the patterns of godliness which illustrate the grace of the gospel and are the faithful copies or transcripts of the life of Christ.

Holy Scripture, then, in its central figure or personality, is the perennial fountain of that new life which has been breathed into humanity. Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word, is at once the wisdom and the power of God, the life and the light of men.

All good, all really true moral influence in the world, whether you be conscious of it or not, has its spring here. Whatever in other systems tends to godliness is a ray of Christianity that has penetrated into the darkness.

III.

But whilst Holy Scripture, in respect of its matter, is inwardly an influence and a life, it is in respect of its form an outstanding authority, an absolute, paramount and everlasting standard or objective criterion, independent of all sentiments or frames of feeling, or subjective conditions.

Whatever authority the Church possesses is derived from Holy Scripture, is in virtue of Scripture. The Church is a Divine institution because it is founded on the explicit laws or principles of Scripture, Jesus Christ being the Head Corner Stone, whereby the whole structure is compactly framed and knit together.

The Church is a living organism, very vital and venerable, immovably grounded on the rock of eternal truth. It is at the same time the indefectible depositary and guardian of that truth in all its integrity, both with respect to the priceless kernel or heart of the doctrine, and the shell or casket, to wit, the written word which contains it. Think how much you owe to this depositary and guardian of the truth which saves.

Whatever authority your creeds, liturgy, homilies and other symbolical books may possess is derived solely from the thorough impregnation of Scripture they have received. The three Creeds so familiar to you, forming, as they do, a secondary standard of faith, are thoroughly to be received and believed. Why? "Because they can be proved by most certain warrants of Holy Scripture."

It is much the same with matters of ecclesiastical government and forms of worship. Although you are not to require or expect an explicit text of Scripture for every straw or indifferent ceremony, yet no general principle or law of Scripture may be slighted or impugned even in things however apparently indifferent.

The early Church fathers had the best opportunity of knowing what the practice and belief of Apostolic times was in matters not strictly defined or prescribed in Holy Scripture, and also what the Apostolic interpretation of passages now in dispute was. Accordingly, the use and practice of primitive Christendom must go a far way in determining subordinate questions of ceremony

or interpretation, upon which the majesty of Holy Scripture, occupied with the great, immutable, eternal principles of morality and religion, does not condescend.

IV.

Because the Church is the depositary of saving doctrine, it is its duty to communicate this treasure not only to all its members, but to the whole brotherhood of man. The revealed word is the bread of life. Only so far as the Church becomes the faithful distributor of this daily bread to men's souls will it gain the public confidence and exercise profound influence.

Only so can the Church bring about unity and become Catholic. "You must all eat of the one bread and drink of the one cup." One spirit realized in divers manner and manifestly in varying proportions must pervade the community.

For authority and liberty, universalism and individualism, Catholicism and Protestantism, whatever contrariety they may present, are each of them singly only half or imperfect truths, opposite and complementary aspects of the one absolute truth. All legitimate or normal diversities of temper and character meet in Christ.

True unity is to be realized in the legitimate exercise of liberty, in the growth and unfolding of the principle of individualism. The unity of the Church does not consist in sameness of parts, but in the multiplicity and free conspiring together of individual wills or personalities, which together constitute a higher harmony.

Personal heartfelt religion is coincident with and necessarily goes to the formation of corporate Christian life.

V.

To attain that unity that is so much to be desired, and is so much needed, there must be an increase of godliness in the single members of the Church, a deepening of personal piety.

In order to deepen personal piety, you must betake yourselves statedly to Holy Scripture. Diligent searching of Scripture and heart scrutiny are necessary. There must be more closet work as well as more conscientious and prayerful assembling of yourselves together.

In the course of the history of the Church, periods of religious sincerity have been times of unity. Such is one great outstanding fact of the primitive Christian community. But after this preliminary period of practical piety had passed away, men who had hitherto followed one sure path began to diverge. On the one side, some deviated to formalism and ritualism, under the banner of a so-called Church authority. Others were drawn into the eccentricities of pietism and the shifting uncertainties of the private spirit under the pretended auspices of liberty.

A one-sided veneration for the authority of the Church is apt to degenerate into rank traditionalism and superstition. A one-sided reverence for the letter of Scripture may grow into the wretched scruples and narrowness of puritanism and hypocrisy.

The Church of England steers its perilous course between these opposite dangers, under the banner and pilotage of Holy Scripture, and so remains both Catholic and Protestant. In its sixth Article you read that "whilst other books claiming canonicity, the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners," to wit, the Apocrypha, yet "Holy Scripture containeth

all things necessary to salvation, so that what is not read therein or may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith or thought requisite or necessary to salvation."

Jesus Christ tells you to "search the Scriptures" because "they testify of Him." The Psalmist gives expression to the beautiful sentiment, "The law of the Lord is perfect. It converts the soul, enlightens the eyes, and rejoices the heart."

The Prophet Isaiah directs you to the proper standard or rule of faith, "To the law and the testimony: if men speak not according to the Word, it is because there is no light in them."

St. Paul told Timothy that the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament are able to "make wise unto salvation." How much greater facility now, do you not possess of attaining saving knowledge with the New Testament canon, and its clearer, fuller, and more glorious revelation superadded?

The first part of the Old Testament coincides with the closing book of the New in impressing on you that you must not add or diminish aught from the authority and integrity of the inspired Word; that if any man or body of men shall be so presumptuous and vain as to add unto it, there should be added unto him the plagues that are written in it; that if, on the other hand, any man shall take away from the word of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the Book of Life, and out of the Holy City, and from the things that are written in this book.

XII.

The Church of England : Catholic and Protestant.

*"The house of God, which is the church of the living God,
the pillar and ground of the truth."*

1 TIMOTHY iii. 15.

I.

HOW condescending and gracious of God to dwell among men ! The church is His house : believers called out of the world are His household. He is here called a living God, a present and active personality. How real this thought is in the consciousness of the Christian ! What a comfort and strength to him !

There are manifold ways in which God shows His presence and activity. He is "the searcher of hearts." Do you realize Him as such, as He "to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid" ? But not only in church, His own house, is His eye on you. In the wider temple of nature, no one can escape His piercing ken at any moment or in any place. Carry this thought of God's living presence with you into all your activities and recreations. It will have an elevating and purifying influence on your mind and heart.

But not merely as "Searcher of hearts" is His presence declared in His church. His living and working power is shown in the renewal and conversion of his children. Regeneration is a creative act—the making new creatures—a birth of water and of the spirit, and therefore a demonstration of Divine omnipotence. The justification of sinners, too, is a Divine act, here and now, an attestation of the presence of the living God. For who can forgive sins—who can impute righteousness to the sinner but God? How else is a garment of perfect righteousness to be provided?

What of the work of continuous sanctification? Are you not told that "you are His workmanship—created in Christ Jesus unto good works"—that it is "God who worketh in you both to will and to do," at the same time that you strive to "work out your own salvation?" All real good you are privileged to do comes from faith and dependence on Him, since without Him you can do nothing acceptably.

But, beloved, the outer building of brick and stone in which you worship is a figure of the spiritual temple, in which believers as lively stones are built up a spiritual house, and in which God's living power is further exhibited. Not only combinedly do Christians form a temple of the living God. St. Paul puts the question to each singly, "Know you not that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and that the spirit of God energizeth and dwelleth in you?"

Remember what Christ in His high priestly prayer says of this living union of God with us, brought about in the Saviour's person and work. Not for His immediate disciples alone, but for all others who believe on Him, He prays that they all may be one, "as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be

one in Us. I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one."

This union is most realized in the crowning point of the Christian service, the Holy Eucharist. There the fact of the communion of saints is best brought home to the Christian consciousness, for "Are ye not all partakers of the one bread?" Can any one who contemplates the new creation presented in the Church and Christendom—the renewal of heart, the regenerate dispositions, the saintly life, the peace and bliss, and numberless other spiritual gifts and powers finding issue in corresponding activities which have changed the face of the earth and transformed society—doubt that the living God is in the midst of you?

"The Church of the living God" is further, by St. Paul, called "the pillar and ground of the truth." It is "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the Head Corner Stone." What reverence, then, ought you to cherish towards this Church of God, which, wherever you meet with it, holds fast to the truth as it is in Jesus, who is the Truth in person. Be sure you have the Church, wherever "the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance."

II.

That which in Christian tradition is Catholic, in addition to the writings of the apostles and prophets and the word of Christ Himself, has a threefold touchstone. That which has been received by all, and has always prevailed, and everywhere been accepted in the Church, must necessarily have its due place and import

assigned to it. All these characters meet in the Church of England. It is scriptural, and apostolic, and Catholic, the exponent of universal and necessary doctrine. Its historical continuity is undoubted. It is reformed and purged from all those popish and super-induced errors in which your forefathers during the dark and middle ages lived, but which, let us hope, did not altogether hide the saving evangelic truth from them. It thus faithfully hands down and maintains pure and entire the precious deposit of apostolic and saving doctrine entrusted to it by our Lord and His apostles.

The doctrinal elaborations of the early Christian centuries, condensed and clearly and comprehensively expressed in the Catholic creeds, enter essentially into its development, and form not merely an essential part of its constitution, but lie at the very basis of Christian commonwealths. Let me briefly explain. The Code of the Roman Empire, in which the Catholic creeds occupy a fundamental place, was, at the breaking up of that empire, incorporated into the civic institutes of all the Christian States that were formed out of its disintegration. Thus deep rooted is the Church in the very political existence of this country and of every other country in Europe. You cannot divorce the Church from the State since they are so vitally blended at the very basis of their constitution. The nation is essentially Christian and Catholic, and the Church is essentially national. Not because of State endowments, but on the ground of legal enactments of the Catholic doctrine.

The reformers of the sixteenth century were so alive to this fact that they were most careful in this particular not to infringe the laws of the empire. It was thus that Calvin, for example, could call in the aid of the State to the inflicting capital punishment on Servetus

in vindication of the Catholic doctrine. There were otherwise no legal basis for the reformed princes and divines in their conflict with the papacy. They would have had no legitimate standing if they had ignored that great body of Catholic doctrine, comprised in the three creeds which had all along constituted a main pillar of the Roman Empire and of the States which sprang out of it. Such was the clearly recognized position which the reformers assumed, and on the strength of which they justifiably carried out their various projects for the correction of abuses and the purging of errors which had sprung up during the darker ages of the Church's history. And thus we have at this day a Church at once Catholic and Protestant—conservative of the apostolic deposit of doctrine and of the Catholic traditions and uses of worship, government, and discipline which have been received always (*semper*) and everywhere (*ubique*) and by all (*ab omnibus*) throughout Christendom; and on the other hand reformed and purged from all the papal errors and superstitions which so far had obscured the truth, a Church which to this day protests against everything contrary to sound doctrine.

Let me further direct your attention to the treasures of Christian devotion in your book of Common Prayer, the ripe and accumulated utterances of piety in the successive ages of the Church—than which more genuine and exquisite breathings of the spirit of prayer are not elsewhere to be met with in the whole circle of Christian literature.

The Church hymns, too, like its prayers, are equally redolent of Holy Scripture. The deepest thoughts of God and His counsels of grace, steeped in the heart, are clothed in the language of the most pathetic emotion, the figurative and poetical imagery of which is

elevating and impressive, so that the sacred music and song has a salutary and widely spread influence.

Such, beloved, is the Church, to the defence of which you are counselled in this unquiet time. "The Jerusalem which is from above is free and is the mother of us all." Hence we speak of Mother Church. And may not Non-conformists use that language of her as well as we? For have they not all derived from her whatever is good in their several systems of doctrine and rules of life? They all, earlier or later, have sprung from her loins. Why, then, repudiate and hate their mother from whom they have derived the knowledge of saving truth and everything else most valuable in Christian devotion, art, and science?

As the visible witness for God in this land; as the palpable embodiment of His kingdom upon earth; as the unwearied propagator of the Gospel both at home and abroad; as the national attestation to Christianity; as the divinely appointed conduit of grace through the word preached and the sacraments duly administered; as the guardian of civic and religious liberty; as the fosterer of the higher literature and of the more refining influences in human society; as the promoter of civilization, of enlightenment, of invention, of true progress, and improvement; as the nurse of religious education in our national schools; as the main pillar of the throne and of the stability of the empire; as the preserver of the domestic sanctities; as the hallower of all the great crises and turning points of individual and of family life; as the mother and governess of souls in course of training for eternity, we claim in these revolutionary days your support for the Church of your fathers.

XIII.

The Invisible Church.

"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom."

HEBREWS i. 8.

I.

THE visible Church is the kingdom of God on earth. Within this visible Church the communion of saints, which forms the invisible, is realized. It is this Church within the Church, the Church invisible, of which it is said, "The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." "They are not all Israel which are of Israel." "He is not a Jew which is one outwardly." "The gospel net gathers of every kind." "The gospel field brings forth tares as well as wheat." The visible Church is made up of all who are called out of the world. But "many are called, whilst few are chosen." The "chosen," or "the elect," form the invisible and true Church. All who hear the Word are called to be saints. But all do not obey that call. All do not love God, and, therefore, are not called to purpose.

II.

On the deep things of foreknowledge and predestination we dare not heedlessly intrude. What, however, St.

Paul says we must accept. "Whom God did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son."

This conformity to the image of the Son of God is the aim and issue of the kingdom of God on earth. In it you have the righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. Here is the highest good of human life, the fulness of grace and happiness.

"A sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of God's kingdom." Nowhere else will you meet with perfect righteousness. In the kingdoms of the world wrong is trenchantly glaring. In the visible Church, too, there are many blemishes and mistakes. In proportion as man is unregenerate—morally imperfect—injustice and violence make themselves felt everywhere. In the assembly of the saints, wrong is an anomaly. In humanity, restored to the image of Christ, sin and other evil is destined to be entirely purged out.

Men without this righteousness cannot please God. Perfect righteousness must be sought nowhere outside of the invisible Church, the communion of saints. The fellowship of believers meet in the one centre, Christ. He is their righteousness and strength. He is "made of God to them wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption."

St. Paul has told you that the elect are predestined to be conformed to the image of the Son of God; and the steps toward this consummation of happiness and bliss are further pointed out by that apostle: "Whom God did predestinate, them He also called." This means effectual calling, the calling to purpose, involving obedience and love, in contradistinction to the mere outward call, which does not necessarily imply a consequent election.

“And whom He called, them He also justified.” Justification is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness to the sinner, which is recognized to be a spotless righteousness. All other righteousness is felt to be alarmingly imperfect in the presence of God. The best righteousness of man is marred by blindness, feebleness, and sin. There is nothing else in heaven or earth for the poor sinner to hold on by but the righteousness of Christ. In the acknowledgment of this fact there is a deep confession of human sinfulness, and of a profound want in the human heart which cannot otherwise be satisfied. Christ’s righteousness is all the salvation and desire of the penitent soul. It draws out your deepest veneration and loyalty. You embrace it wholly and unreservedly, and will have no other.

The laying down of the burden of your sins at the foot of the Cross, and the receiving of Christ and His righteousness in all its extent and entirety, with all the capacity and strength of your mind, is the great turning-point of your life. From henceforth you have another standard of excellence to measure yourself by than those that are in vogue generally.

This justification, the realization of the act of God whereby He imputes your sins to Christ, and Christ’s righteousness to you, and draws out your deepest devotion and loyalty, is the first step to the realization of your normal condition as God’s children, an anticipation of what you ought to be and will be by divine grace.

III.

In the kingdom of God, all appliances are provided, in its foundation, in its constitution, in its ministry of the Word and sacraments for bringing about your

redemption from the sin and misery of a fallen and corrupt condition. The sacraments are direct conduits of grace.

Thus, in Holy Baptism, God opens His fatherly arms to His erring children, wishes to receive them to His heart, vouchsafes His favour and help, and promises to make them true subjects of His kingdom, that, being members of the Church invisible, or incorporated into Christ's mystical body, they might be His sons and heirs both here and hereafter.

The being "a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven" binds you over to a life of righteousness. You feel that you are no longer your own, but redeemed, God's property and servant, whose will is your freedom and bliss, to whom you yield your powers and faculties as instruments of righteousness. To glorify God in your body and spirit, which are His, becomes your highest end.

The successive steps in the great mystery of sanctification are thus succinctly explained in the seventeenth Article of your book of Common Prayer. "Those called according to God's purpose by His Spirit working in due season through grace obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ; they walk religiously in good works, and at length by God's mercy attain to everlasting felicity."

From what has been said, it will be clearly understood of what sort of righteousness it is affirmed that "a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Christ's kingdom." Whatever is not of that righteousness shall decay and perish. Whatever of alien nature any one builds upon the one foundation, Christ, shall be burned up in the fire of judgment. Other basis can no one lay.

IV.

Attestation to this righteousness has been palpably presented in the Christian Church throughout the successive centuries since the apostolic days. The Church has stood firm on its foundation of apostles and prophets and head Corner Stone Christ, amidst all changes of time and conflicts of parties.

Upon the rock of St. Peter's confession, which comprehends all else essential, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," it has been raised up, and all the forces of hell shall not prevail against it.

In the darkest ages, the bright beacon of life and grace could not be obscured. The righteousness of Christ shone through the gathering gloom. Papal errors and superstitions could not blind the believer to the atoning work and merits of the Redeemer, in which all the highest hopes and destiny of mankind were bound up.

Else, how could your forefathers have been saved who lived in papal errors and superstition? The essential truth flared through it all. There was no concealing it. The creeds repeated in the daily services contained all saving doctrine. The public prayers—many of them, at least—breathed a spirit of absolute dependence on the grace of God and on the propitiatory sacrifice and merits and righteousness of Christ. At the hour of death, Christ was held up to the departing soul as its only and effectual help and refuge.

Well, your Church has been purged from the super-induced traditions and false beliefs of the Papacy, and there is nothing of the sort, if it be not your own weakness and folly, to hide from you the full blaze of gospel

truth. The Sun of Righteousness has arisen anew, and shines with more than mid-day splendour.

The old folly is, however, still to-day perpetrated. The imagination of man's heart runs riot. The numberless sects in Christendom show the multifarious devices to which man betakes himself.

Against all such dangers your Church duly and uncompromisingly guards you in its Eighteenth Article. For, just as St. Peter, in the midst of the ecclesiastical divisions and scandals of his day, declared that "there is salvation in no other," so your Church adopts his language, and pronounces anathema on all "who presume to say that every man shall be saved by the law or sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law, and the light of nature. For Holy Scripture doth set forth unto you only the name of Jesus Christ whereby men must be saved."

Our Lord Himself tells you that there is but one door to His sheepfold, the Church. At one time He is the Door, at another, the Shepherd. The porter who opens the door is the Holy Ghost. The sheep hear the Shepherd's voice, follow Him, and are saved. They go in and out at His call, and find pasture. In order that they may have life, He lays down His own. Whosoever does not go in by the door, but climbeth up some other way, is to be looked on as a thief and a robber.

V.

Now, is it because the gate is narrow and the way strait which leadeth to life, that the modern votaries of illuminism and of the wisdom of this age wish to pull

down the fences of the Lord's vineyard, the barriers of the sheepfold?

Is the way which leadeth unto destruction not broad enough, and its gate not wide enough, that the surest landmarks and safeguards of religion and morality must be ruthlessly torn down?

And what do the illuminists of the present day propose to do with your churches? Why, turn them into lecture-rooms or dancing-halls, or some such secular purpose, to swell the tide of revelry and of pleasure-intoxication which is already hurrying down countless souls heedlessly to perdition.

All the secularist and grasping spirits of unrest appear to have been stirred to their depth in our day. They would break down our hedges. Every one who passeth by the way would pluck up the Lord's vine. The boar out of the wood would root it out, and the wild beast of the field devour it.

A man used to be accounted famous according as he lifted up the axe upon the thick trees. Now, the enemies of God's sanctuary roar in the midst of the congregation, would raise ensigns for signs, *i.e.* the banners of war in the place of the tokens or symbols of grace and peace, and would wickedly perpetrate desolations. They would break down the carved work thereof with axes and hammers. They would cast fire into it, and defile the dwelling-place of the most High, even to its base.

But, hallelujah! "God is known in the palaces of Zion for a sure refuge. As you have heard, so you have seen in the city of the Lord of Hosts, in the city of our God. God will establish it for ever."

"The Lord is greatly to be praised in the mountain of His holiness. His right hand is full of righteousness. Let Zion rejoice; let the daughters of Judah be glad

because of His judgments. Walk about Zion, and go round about her. Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces, that ye may tell it to the generation following. For this God is your God for ever and ever: He is a defence against all adversaries, and will be your guide even unto death."

XIV.

St. Peter, the Apostle of Hope; His First Epistle.

I.

ONE chief subject of Christian contemplation during the season of Advent is the prospective coming of the risen and exalted Saviour in power and great glory.

Before His first Advent He enjoyed what is called His pre-existent glory. Previous to His second Advent, He has been reinstated in the full glory which He had with the Father before the world was.

At His first Advent He divested Himself of His eternal glory and came in lowliness. At His second coming He will appear in the glory of the Father and all His holy angels with Him.

Accordingly, the second Advent is an epoch to which the Church from the beginning has looked forward with eager longing. It is, indeed, the one object in the future which dazzles with its splendour the eye of faith, and exercises a certain fascination and power, not always normal, over the human heart, as witness the extravagances of millennial expectation both of former and of later times.

That the time has been left in uncertainty is one of the merciful provisions of your heavenly Father, with which out of curiosity you may not intermeddle, but for which you ought to be thankful, since the practical benefit of the expectation is apparent, hope and the other

highest active energies being thereby kept in lively exercise. How strong a motive-force this specific form of expectation may be is well worth thinking of.

In order really to know this, you must put it to the test of experience. It is absolutely expedient that you realize or bring home to yourselves the great fact which is to signalize the close of the present dispensation, because the grand winding up of earthly existence, for anything you know, may dawn upon you at any moment.

If you did but realize this, would things be as they are now? From time to time you hear much of the immorality and degradation which to a most gigantic and alarming extent abounds in the midst of our Christian society. Would there really be any of it if the people actually and livingly cherished the hope of Christ's Advent, and gave themselves to the assiduous preparation of heart and life which naturally comes of that hope?

In the Collect for Advent you pray that you may cast off the works of darkness and put on the whole armour of light, in order that having the light of knowledge, purity, and holiness kindled in your hearts here, you may hereafter rise to the life immortal and that light which knows no setting or obscurity.

Now, what are the works of darkness which, in the light of the truth before you, you are bound to cast off? The root of all such evil works lies deep in the human heart, to which you must try to reach, else all mere superficial reformation will be to little purpose.

Practically the root of all vice whatsoever is twofold. It has both an intellectual and a moral side. The root evil shoots up into ignorance on the one hand, and into selfishness with its manifold ramifications and evil fruits on the other.

Your great task, then, is to tear up this great root evil with its twin upas-spreading branches of ignorance and selfishness, so that your nature may attain its normal and free unfolding in intelligence and holiness, with the beneficent virtues and good fruits which are their legitimate outcome.

II.

I have chosen to-day to say a few words to you on the First Epistle of St. Peter, because the more you read it, you are likely to find in its main subject a peculiar appropriateness to this season of Advent.

St. Peter has been called the Apostle of Hope, and his inspired compositions breathe throughout a serene spirit of hope. They describe to you from what root Christian hope springs, and to what happy results it leads. They set before you at once its source and object.

Apart from this ground tone of hope, this First Epistle of St. Peter has been characterized as eclectic, because the variety of materials contained in it are thought to have been derived or culled from different sources, and then elaborated and fused together. Indeed, there can be no doubt of the great versatility as well as vigour of genius of the author.

It has been observed that it is comparatively wanting in the bold originality, argumentative power, and striking views which are so marked features of St. Paul's Epistles, as well as lacking the transcendental soaring and deep spiritual mystic intuition of the compositions of St. John. Precisely on the ground of that tone of sobriety and moderation which characterize it, doubts have been thrown on its Petrine authorship.

But with all its chastened temper, it is manifestly

the effusion of an impulsive, fiery and strong spirit; and its unity amidst a multiplicity of details is such as comes of a profound Christian intuition. It is the natural product of a sanguine, hopeful temperament like St. Peter's, so much so that his individuality seems stamped on it.

III.

Our business with it now, however, is its bearing on the season of Advent, and the condition of preparedness or unpreparedness which the Christian society around you exhibits for the reception of the Lord, when He shall come to you in the majesty of His kingly glory.

As you know, St. Peter was writing to the scattered members of the Church throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bithynia, and proconsular Asia.

Well, what was the condition of those Christians? The Church presented the aspect of a new creation in contrast to the heathen world, and the rapid decay and dissolution of the old state of things.

The Christian was "begotten again," a new creature, begotten, as St. Peter expresses it more generally, "by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever, for all flesh is as grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, the flower thereof falleth away, but the Word of God," which regenerates and makes humanity immortal and glorious, "endureth for ever."

The believer, he tells you more specifically, "is begotten again through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

And to what does St. Peter tell you that the Christian has been begotten? Why, to a living or "lively

hope of an inheritance incorruptible, immarcescible, reserved in heaven, ready to be revealed in the last time."

This hope of the future revelation of the risen Redeemer, and the blessed inheritance beyond, in the natural course of things, leads to the exercise of such a genuine faith and love as would meet with praise, honour, and reward at the Advent, when the great Master and Lord, who is now hidden from His Church, in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing ye rejoice, would appear to consummate its bliss.

The blessed consummation or final accomplishment of salvation, which was to be wrought out for its members, had been the object of the eager curiosity and diligent research of the Old Testament prophets, who foretold, dimly though truly, somewhat of these future glories. Further, it was a subject into which the very angels desired to look.

In fond anticipation of the grace which was to attain its fulfilment at the Revelation of Jesus Christ, the Christian was to be assiduous in the practice of holiness. For just as "He who had called them" to this state of salvation or sure hope of an eternal inheritance "was holy, so were they to be holy in all manner of conversation." The great argument as well as propelling motive to holiness was the fact of the redemption of mankind by the precious blood of Christ, and the consequent exaltation of the Redeemer.

The faith and hope in God which the reflection on, and contemplation of these great facts inspired, besides the other virtues, led to the practice of sympathy and brotherliness.

For the Christian community forms a corporeity or organic unity. However separated in time or space, the

members meet in Christ. He is the head Corner Stone, elect, precious; all others are living stones built upon this foundation and forming a spiritual house, to wit, the Church invisible. In the interchange of the warmest and most disinterested affection, and in the conscious feeling of interdependence and unity the one with the other and with Christ, they constitute "an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people." They had accordingly to "offer up spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ, and to proclaim" in some palpable, substantial way "the praises of Him who had called them out of darkness into His wonderful light."

Now you see from the apostle's own account that darkness or ignorance was at least one of the conditions out of which, in the apostolic age, Christians had been redeemed, the condition in which their Gentile neighbours then lived.

That condition of ignorance was one of selfishness, and the other vices which are so many forms of selfishness.

But the converted of them did not now conform themselves to their blind, brutal propensities, as they formerly did in their ignorance, because they knew the folly of such a course, and saw around them manifold and fearful instances of it.

For what were the specific forms of selfishness in which their heathen neighbours lived, in which the time past of their own life previous to conversion had been spent?

Why, the very vices which, from all accounts, abound amongst so many people to-day, so that if some other of the Christians of that age or St. Peter himself, were to rise from the dead and make his appearance amongst us, he might think that, whatever other improvements during the past eighteen and a half centuries may have

been made in the Christian society around us, he was still in the midst of a population not so very exempt or far removed from the irrational and frantic orgies of a Bacchus, or the mystic and voluptuous rites of a Cybele or Aphrodite.

Before St. Paul and his companions had preached the Gospel in the provinces of lesser Asia, the inhabitants of those regions had lived in all the licentiousness and sottishness of polytheism or nature-worship. They had walked in the open or unrestrained gratification of immodest desires, excess of wine, Bacchantic revels and other inordinances, just as society around you in some of its branches appears still to do.

But those of them who had been converted had not only bid farewell to the grosser vices of heathenism; they had already parted, or felt themselves bound to part with all the more subtle moral evils whatsoever, whether guile, hypocrisy, envy, or evil-speaking.

For there were then two very pressing ends to look to, just as there are two now. (1) The one was the apology or account of their hope to be rendered to their heathen neighbours. (2) The other was the reckoning or account to be given in at the last to Almighty God.

1. By cherishing the love of Christ, and looking forward with hopeful anticipation to His second coming, they would be allured and constrained to the practice of the Christian virtues. If they sanctified Christ in their hearts, they would enjoy the sweets of a good conscience, and be so well furnished otherwise with most substantial proofs of genuine religion, that they could, in ordinary course, render a convincing answer to the gainsayer. To the unbeliever, who interrogated them as to the foundation of their Christian hope, their outward behaviour,

which was quite in accordance with the blessed spirit they cherished, might well be a conclusive answer. Those who falsely accused their good conversation in Christ Jesus should thereby be confuted and ashamed.

It is true they had to exercise the Christian virtues in very trying circumstances, in the midst of fiery trials, persecution, and martyrdom, but it was a glorious thing to suffer for well-doing, and it afforded an opportunity for more than an ordinary exhibition of Christian grace and fortitude. They were blessed who endured for the sake of righteousness. The Spirit of glory and of God rested upon them. They were to make proof of their faith, and to triumph in the midst of suffering. For Jesus Christ before them had suffered and overcame, being "put to death in the flesh, but quickened in the spirit, by which also He went and preached to the spirits in prison," a notable passage, very characteristic of the individuality of the author of this letter.

That, beloved, is just the way in which you must endeavour to bring the lapsed Christian or pagan masses around you to a better mind.

Christian example is the great moral lever of society. You ought to ashame the accuser and the scoffer by the genuine exhibition of Christian virtue. Your Christianity, to be constraining and powerful over others, must necessarily be of that sterling character which St. Peter describes in this Epistle.

As strangers and pilgrims, you are to cultivate disinterestedness, and exhibit to the world around you a beautifully harmonious and honourable life, that those who see your good works may glorify God.

A hard task for the Christians of that time to cherish loyalty to the persecuting emperors of heathen Rome, and to pay due tribute, honour, and obedience to the

oppressive fiscal or other civic dignitaries who had been set over them in the provinces. St. Peter's exhortation to that duty of loyalty is not so urgent now or so difficult of performance.

Slavery was an institution of antiquity and apostolic times. St. Peter exhorts the converted slaves to be respectful and submissive to their masters, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward and crooked. There are not the same hardships in the lot of Christian men and women now.

Wives were to gain over their heathen husbands to Christianity by a pure and godly conversation, as slaves in the same way were to endeavour after the conversion of their masters. "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is, in the sight of God, of great price," was to be the moment of the conversion of unbelieving men. "Holy women of old adorned themselves in that manner." These also are thoughts which strikingly mark the individuality of the writer of this letter.

Husbands were to cherish all tenderness and consideration for their wives, "giving honour as unto the weaker vessel, and being heirs together of the grace of God, that their prayers be not hindered."

The will of God, as revealed in Christ, was simply by well doing in all relations and spheres of life, to put to silence the gainsayer and to confute the ignorant and foolish. Such is the will and call of God to you now.

2. But they had another and second end, which you also have, and ought more particularly to keep in mind during this Advent season.

You have to give an account to Him who is ready to judge both the quick and the dead.

Jesus Christ is your Judge, and He is a most holy

and righteous Judge. But when He will come and make reckoning with you, you are not permitted to know.

St. Peter, writing to the members of the Asiatic Churches, intimates to them that the end of all things is at hand.

Nearly nineteen centuries have since passed away, and the end is not yet. But you look forward to it as a certainty. Sooner or later it will come. Practically, it may come to you at any moment by death, as you are reminded from time to time by the removal from your midst of one or other of those who for years have been intimately connected with you, and who have left behind them bright memories. They all earnestly admonish you to be emulously zealous in preparing against that great crisis.

Oh, be sure, "The great and terrible day of the Lord" draws nearer every hour you live. See that no day passes over your head without a growing preparedness for His reception.

"Be sober and watchful unto prayer." Above all things, have knowledge and fervent love, the great counteractives of the root of sin in the heart and intellect. Love not only covers a multitude of sins, but is an effectual cure for them all.

The love of the Good Physician is the healing salve for all bruised and broken hearts. It renews, reinvigorates and transforms the soul in which it finds a congenial resting-place and home.

Oh, beloved, cherish love and knowledge, since they are the omnipotent forces for the regeneration of the individual life as well as of society.

XV.

St. Peter, the Apostle of Hope : His Second Epistle.

I.

WE shall not, on the present occasion, dwell upon the subject of the authenticity of this Second Epistle General of St. Peter. Suffice it to say that it was not, in the early Church, universally received as genuine and authentic previous to the Council of Laodicea, 364 A.D.

A point of much interest and moment in modern discussions is the close resemblance this Epistle bears, in its description of the false teachers of those times, to that given in the General Epistle of St. Jude, which is throughout occupied with this special subject. On the ground of this striking resemblance, some are disposed to pronounce the second chapter, and the first part of the third, to be taken by St. Peter from St. Jude's Epistle, or to have been an addition from another hand to the original letter.

Wrongly, for though there is no denying a close approximation in language and ideas, there is no necessity for supposing either that St. Peter copied from St. Jude's epistle, or St. Jude from St. Peter's, an action altogether beneath the dignity of an apostle, or that the

passage was interpolated at a later period, since both apostles may have been in possession of a common document, or may have been recipients of the same oral tradition.

There is perfect unity in the letter, howsoever you may account for the close coincidences of the subject matter of the second and third chapters with the contents of St. Jude's letter. It will be the object of this discourse to point out the unity and harmony of the entire letter as it is now in your hands.

II.

Mark, then, that its keynote is the "Parousia," or the personal presence of the risen and exalted Saviour, which fact shows you how happily the reading of this Epistle comes in the due course of the daily morning lessons at the beginning of this Advent season.

The "Parousia," or personal presence of Christ to judgment, is, in the course of this Epistle, characterized by such expressions as "the day of the Lord," "the coming of the day of God," "the advent of the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," "the power and presence of Jesus Christ our Lord," and is coincident with the inauguration of the "new heavens and the new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."

Such being the keynote of the letter, St. Peter exclusively from this point of view, on the one hand directs his remarks of counsel and warning to the members of the Church, and on the other levels a vehement and bitter invective against the false teachers and scoffers

who everywhere were springing up to disturb its peace.

His remarks were the more telling on account of the personal foreboding of his own approaching end, as well as the vivid consciousness or realization of the end, sooner or later, of all other things. For he tells them of his speedy laying aside of his tabernacle of flesh, as the Lord did show him in that wonderful prophecy previous to His Ascension. Jesus said to him, "When thou wast young thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not."

St. Peter tells the members of the Church that after his departure from them, according to the Lord's prophecy, they were to keep before their mind the great fact of the "Parousia," or second Advent, and the obligations and duties which followed from such an anticipation.

For what did the Apostle tell the members of the Church they had to do in the contemplation and consciousness of the great future event that lay before them?

Why, they were to bend all their endeavours that way, to hasten forward to it, to be zealous for nothing so much as to be found of Christ in peace, blameless and without spot.

St. Peter, combining in his own mental character the practical tendency of St. James with the intellectualism of St. Paul and the mysticism of St. John, gives in this Epistle impressive exhortations to growing and progressive Christian character; exhortations unique and denotive of strong individuality in the writer, which make on the minds of those who first read and

learn them a more indelible impression than perhaps anything else of the sort in the whole circle of New Testament Epistles.

There is something that very specially and forcibly commends itself to the conscience and good sense of every one in the admonition, for example, "to add to faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience piety or godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity or love," which graces together make an approximately complete circle of Christian virtue, combining in one picture the most varied excellences of character. These virtues make the possessor neither idle nor without answerable fruits. Christians were to be the more earnest or zealous to make their calling and election sure by the cultivation of those graces, inasmuch as they were, in their inherent nature, imperishable. Those who cultivated and progressed in them would never fail, for an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour would be given at the great "Parousia."

But, anticipating the objections of the false teachers, St. Peter assures them that he has not followed sophistical reasonings, fond inventions, or cunningly forged myths, in making known to them the presence or second coming of Christ.

For he himself and the two other favoured disciples had beheld the Saviour transfigured before them on the holy mount, and had observed the glory and majesty of His person. The Lord had there and then, in their hearing, received honourable attestation from the Highest, the miraculous Voice from the sanctuary or holy of holies of the Divine Presence, testifying to His Sonship and His regal or Messianic character. His

inherent Divinity, and the future power and outward dignity, to which, after His sufferings and death, He should be exalted, had thus been certified to them.

Such a concrete presentation or unveiling of the Redeemer in His celestial and glorified character, though isolated in His history, was of itself sufficient to raise in the beholders the sublimest conceptions and the most sanguine expectations of the grandeur of the second Advent. Still they had, in the prophetic word, even a surer and fuller testimony of His Messianic kingdom and glory than that to fall back upon. For the more particular features of it are there revealed, and that revelation of the minuter details was implicitly to be depended upon, since "no prophecy of Scripture is of private interpretation, because prophecy came not of old time by the will of men, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

III.

Now, in the second part of the Epistle, that part which resembles St. Jude's letter so closely, St. Peter directs a crushing invective against the errorists, who should arise previous to the second Advent; that, just as amongst the Jews there were false prophets, so there should arise false teachers in the Christian Church. Their errors would be partly speculative or theoretic, partly practical. They would introduce destructive or damnable heresies, and deny the Lord that bought them. Through covetousness they should follow the ways of Balaam, and love the wages of iniquity. Having hearts exercised to grasping practices, they should, with enticing words, make merchandise of the simple, and beguile the unstable. Many should follow their lawless or

pernicious tenets, and by a corrupt example cause the way of truth to be blasphemed or evil-spoken of. These false teachers would be presumptuous or overweening and self-willed. They should despise angelic dignities. Having eyes full of adultery and inclined to other most damning and horrid vices, they would never cease from sin, accursed children.

Some of them, having for a time escaped the pollution of the world through the reflective knowledge of Christ, had been again implicated in iniquity and overcome; their last estate, therefore, according to the proverb, was worse than their first.

As these false teachers propounded many other opinions which led to perdition, so in special they denied and scoffed at the "Parousia," or second Advent of the Redeemer. "Where is the promise of His coming?" they asked, after their boastful and ungodly manner. "For since the fathers fell asleep all things have continued as they were from the beginning of the creation."

But that all things had not continued as they were from the beginning of the creation, nor were likely to do so, they had convincing proofs in the past history of mankind.

"The fountains of the great deep," for example, "had been broken up in the days of Noah, and overwhelmed the world of the ungodly."

The earth in the time of Lot had opened its jaws and poured out from its central magazines sulphurous fires, burning up the wicked and their works in Sodom, Gomorrah, and the other cities of the plain.

There were other instances, which St. Peter passes over, such as the swallowing up of Korah and his company, mentioned by St. Jude.

But, previous to creation, he mentions, as does also St. Jude, the case of the rebel angels whom God had cast into Tartarus, and was reserving for the judgment.

The heavens, the earth, the sea, the very elements, he tells them, subsisted from of old by the Word of God, and were dependent on His nod. They were now preserved and kept in store by the same Word, designed to subserve His beneficent schemes of mercy in regard to the elect, but, on the other hand, also reserved for the no less salutary purpose unto fire against the Day of Judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

The "Parousia" was a sure event, because it stood upon the promises of God, and the right way to look upon the delay of Christ's Advent was to accept it as an instructive instance of Divine mercy and long-suffering. The intervening time, if well used, would bring salvation to the penitent and contrite. To those who judged rightly it was the price of eternity. However long it might appear to the over-sanguine, and whatever security it might present to the godless, it was not a long period from the standpoint of eternity. "A thousand years is to the Lord as one day; and one day," involving, as it sometimes does, the destiny of an immortal soul, assumes the amazing proportions of "a thousand years."

St. Peter, in one of the sublimest passages of Holy Writ, shows the transientness of all those props of unbelief, namely, the so-called immutability of the laws of nature and the eternal fixity of the elements, upon which the scoffer builds his expectation.

For with the sudden Advent of the Lord, everything transitory and vain should be brought to nought.

The things which, in their inherent nature, are eternal, should alone survive the wreck of creation and

the perdition of the ungodly. What, beloved, are those eternal things?

Why, those graces and virtues to the exercise of which St. Peter had been exhorting the members of the Church. Faith, hope and love, temperance, godliness, purity, truth, righteousness, and other forms of virtue, are as eternal as the very nature or being of God Himself.

The heavens should pass away with a great noise. The elements should melt with fervent heat. The earth and all that is therein should be burned up. Things should again be resolved into that primeval fire-mist or cosmic vapour out of which originally they sprang. Such, beloved, is the revelation of science concerning the early beginnings of created things, and such, in conformity thereto, is the revelation of the inspired word in regard to the great end or catastrophe which shall signalize the "Parousia," or the second Advent of the Redeemer. Creation will thus have completed its grand cycle.

Behold, therefore, the true purpose of all this earthly scene. It is subservient to eternity, and it fails of its intended purpose if it does not discipline for eternity. The grand dissolving views of nature or phantasmagoria of creation, which are perishable, must evolve or develop in you these excellences of character which are imperishable. The transitory must evoke from the depths of the human heart the mighty shadow or image of the intransitory. The Word of God is the only thing in the world which shall never pass away. The Word of God is nigh to you, even in your hearts, and in your mouths, as St. Paul says. That Word is Jesus Christ the Lord. Jesus Christ in you here and now the hope of glory, is the surest pledge of His personal and future presence.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but God's Word, the Spirit or the sublime likeness or transcript of the Redeemer in human hearts, shall endure intact in the august presence of the Great Judge, amidst the death throes of an expiring universe.

XVI.

The Denouement of the Conflict between Good and Evil.

(AN EPISODE BETWEEN THE SIXTH AND SEVENTH SEAL.)

REVELATION vii.

THE book of the Revelation has been fitly chosen to be read during the season of Advent, because there is so much in it having a direct reference to the second coming of Christ.

I.

There is towards its close the detailed account of the resurrection, and the great white throne or judgment seat, and the passing of the verdict on the assembled dead, small and great, according to the history of the life of each one carefully recorded in the heavenly registers.

There are many parts of this wonderful book full of enigmas and mystery. Those who have thought most over what it contains have been fullest of doubts and questionings, and have proposed the most strangely varied and conflicting hypotheses.

How far this Revelation discloses the history of the Church in its successive epochs; how far it sets forth the maturing of the Divine providence in regard to it,

with reference to the other great forces and moments of human history ; how far its successive conflicts, victories, and developments are here really represented ; how far, in short, it is a historical allegory or drama, we cannot say and need not.

That is a far deeper question than we can pretend at present to enter upon, far deeper than people in general have time or thought to profit from by endlessly puzzling their brains with it.

Therefore we shall rest content with an easier explanation, one more practical, which, therefore, will come home to you more. Now, what are some of the practical lessons of this strangely awful and sublime series of prophetic pictures ?

Why, if you overlook the practical element in it, there is no unity or consistence in the work. It has no pervading idea, no plan, so to speak. It wants the very thing which gives it purpose and significance.

But with the recognition of this moral groundwork, the picture is strangely harmonious, part corresponds to part, the various figures or representations fit in admirably together.

How strange the figures ! Who can wonder sufficiently at the thought of that throne in heaven, and its mysterious Occupant, from whom issue lightnings, voices, and thunderings, reminding you somewhat of the awful appearance of Jehovah on Mount Sinai, before whom burned seven lamps, which are symbolic of the seven spirits of God ? And what will you make of the glassy sea, clear as crystal ; or the four beasts or cherubim, the one like a lion, the other like a calf, the third like the face of a man, the fourth like a flying eagle, which by some of the early Fathers are understood to represent the four Gospels ?

Surrounding the throne also are the four and twenty elders, seated on thrones, having on their heads crowns of gold, and beyond them a wider circle of the angels and of the redeemed.

Then there is at the right hand of the throne that book, written within and without, sealed with seven seals, which the Lamb of the tribe of Judah alone was found worthy to open; which, when opened, disclosed such singular figures of differently coloured horses with riders, and of angels with trumpets.

The passage now before you is an episode between the disclosure of the sixth seal and the opening of the seventh. If you attentively consider, it will be found to have in it some of those general features which characterize the whole book and bind all parts together in unity.

For what does it tell you of some of the most common things, the elements and forces of nature—the winds, for example? That they are in charge of the angels of God; that four angels stationed at the four corners of the earth, or, in modern and more strictly correct language, the cardinal points of the compass, have been commissioned by God to hold the winds in safe keeping until such time as they be needed for devastation and judgment.

The supernatural is thus made to invest the commonest objects in nature, so that the veil, which familiarity and custom throws around the phenomena and forces of the universe, is once for all withdrawn, and you get a lasting insight into the angelic machinery and the centre spring of it all, the Divine Mind and Will, which never ceases to work in sustaining the things and creatures God has made, and turning them whithersoever it pleaseth Him.

Accordingly, the Almighty God, the all-ruling One, who created all things, is the fixed object of those ceaseless ascriptions of praise which the four beasts, the twenty-four elders, and the myriads of angels and of the redeemed are represented as offering.

And so you find other parts of nature represented as under the guardian care of angels. In one place, for example, you read of the angel of the rivers and fountains, which notion was also hugely congruent to the keen spiritual sensibility and quick intuition of the old Greeks, whose fertile imagination peopled every corner of the outward world with supernatural beings.

Day and night, light and darkness, the sun, moon, and stars, are likewise in the book of Revelation set forth as obedient to and fulfilling the word of God.

Indeed, so much is this the case, that it puts you in mind of the *Benedicite*, usually sung during Advent, in which all natural objects are called upon to bless, magnify, and praise God. You know how, in the History of the Three Children, the fire, the most destructive of the elements, was proved to be under the care and keeping of the angels of God.

Now, you find in the passage before you that the four angels who had the charge of the winds had injunctions not to injure the earth, nor the sea, nor any tree, until the commission of another angel, who ascends from the rising of the sun, and has a seal wherewith to seal the complete number of the redeemed of the tribes of Israel, has been accomplished.

At the conclusion of the lesson you are presented with a picture of the perfected state, the countless number of saints gathered before the throne from every nation, tribe, people, or tongue, clothed in white raiment,

holding palms in their hands, and hymning the praises of God and of the Lamb.

As one of the twenty-four elders told St. John that the assembled crowd before him are "they who came out of great tribulation," so the whole Apocalypse is in a manner a revelation of the great conflict between good and evil that is ceaselessly carried on throughout the length and breadth of creation, through which those holy and sanctified ones in heaven have passed, and which, in the footsteps of the Crucified, you must also pass.

II.

The kind of tribulation you must undergo, the conflict you have to wage, is shadowed forth in a variety of ways.

1. There is, for example, the numberless hosts of locusts, which, under the leadership of their King Abaddon or Apollyon, issue out of the nethermost abyss and overspread the earth.

2. There is the great flaming red dragon, the chief impersonation of evil, having seven heads, each with a diadem and ten horns, whose huge convolution and tail is potent to sweep a third part of the stars from heaven.

3. There is that other great impersonation of evil, set forth to you under the figure of a leopard or pard, the feet of which resembled those of a bear; its mouth was like that of a lion; after which the whole earth is represented as following and doing homage, saying, "Who is like unto the beast?" It had on its head names of blasphemy, and spake great swelling words.

4. There is the voluptuous side of evil, perhaps the most dangerous of all, represented under the figure of a

woman clothed in scarlet and purple, surrounded with all other sorts of sensuous attraction, quite answering to the Greek conception of Circe or the enchantress, holding out the golden cup of enchantment to the deluded nations, and making them drunk or infatuated with the mixed chalice of her sorceries and idolatries, a very mother of damnable witcheries and abominations.

Now, if you consider the manifold and dreadful plagues or visitations that in this book are represented as overtaking the dupes or deluded victims of this great sorceress, or the worshippers of the dragon, or of the pard, who are also characterized by the practice of all other kinds of vice or wickedness; if you consider the contents of the seven vials of the wrath of God, or the other scourges inflicted on the earth—the pestilence, the famine, the ravages of war, the earthquakes, and other convulsions of the elements, you will be reminded of the analogous temporal judgments denounced on idolaters and other transgressors of the law of God in that grand old book of Deuteronomy, perhaps the grandest and most eloquent book of the Old Testament, from which it appears Isaiah caught so much of his fire and inspiration, as probably St. John here. There is so much similarity of thought and style between the two authors.

Remember the closing summary of this Revelation—that to him who should add anything to the words of this prophecy, God should add the plagues that are written in this book, and you will be struck with the harmony of the Old with the New Testament in this special aspect of denunciation of judgment.

Then, on the other hand, to him who successfully withstands and conquers evil, what exceedingly great encouragements and rewards are held out!

1. "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which grows in the paradise of God."

2. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."

3. "To the conqueror I will give of the hidden manna, and a white stone, and on the stone a new name written, which none but he who receiveth it doth know."

4. "He that overcometh shall be clothed in white raiment, and I will not wipe his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before the Father, and before the angels."

For your further encouragement in the conflict with evil, the figure of Jesus Christ, the victorious Conqueror on the white horse, accompanied by the armies of heaven, such as He can be discerned by the keen spiritual susceptibility of His followers, is presented in bold, never-to-be-forgotten outlines; the thought of whom ought and will surely cheer and brace you in the conflict; for against His might no evil principality can stand long; yea, all evil principalities and everything else evil will be made subservient to the manifestation of His glory and His power.

And so throughout the book you have descriptions of the successes, the rewards and blessedness of the saints, who are described to you as in possession of plenary and eternal joys in the immediate presence of God, an indefinitely more than ample recompense for all the tribulation they have endured here.

Think of the new heavens and the new earth, purged of all the evil and unhappiness, the bereavements and sorrows of the present life.

Think of the beautiful description of the heavenly Jerusalem that is given you in this book, and make up

your minds once for all, whether or not, seeing there is no neutral ground, you will join yourselves to the confederacy of evil; or, renouncing those sins which inevitably bring such dire judgment, present and future, cleave to God and become heirs of the promises.

Remember, in conclusion, that by the description of the holy city, the entranced apostle desires to assure you that the tabernacle of God, with all its glories, is with you here and now; that God is a living God, immediately near, of whose power, wisdom, and goodness all things are the instruments; that you have in your souls now either the beginnings of that heavenly condition which will be realized in fullest fruition above, or the germs of that evil or wickedness which will ripen to the extinction of all the more generous principles of your nature, and the everlasting wretchedness and perdition in hell of body, soul, and spirit.

XVII.

St. John the Baptist's Preaching: a Preparation for the First Advent of Christ.

ST. MATTHEW xi. 2-11.

A SUNDAY or two ago your attention was drawn to one of the means of preparation for the Lord's Advent, to wit, Holy Scripture. Your minds will now dwell for a short time upon a second means, namely, the Baptist's preaching and the ministry of other Advent witnesses.

How were the men of His own day made ready? Was it not by a course of faithful and arousing ministry? St. John the Baptist's preaching fell upon the people of that age like a thunder peal. It, however, proved hugely congenial to the deeper religious consciousness and sentiments of the time.

I.

The practical tenor of the Baptist's ministry is clearly indicated in the Synoptical Gospels. "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." "Bring ye forth fruits meet for repentance," since the axe of the Divine judgment is already laid to the root of the corrupt Jewish theocracy. Besides other isolated moral apophthegms, there are given in St. Luke's Gospel very

characteristic answers to the different classes who flocked to his baptism at Jordan, and asked, "Master, what shall we do?" To the ordinary citizen he said, "He that hath two coats, let him give to him who hath none, and he that hath meat, let him do likewise"; to the oppressive fiscal officers, "Exact no more than what is appointed you"; to the soldiers, "Shake violently no man; do not act the part of the sycophant or false informer, and be content with your rations."

The theoretical or doctrinal element of his instruction is condensed in a few words at the beginning of St. John's Gospel. His office was to make straight the way for Him who was much mightier, who was before him in virtue of His pre-existent condition, who was the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world, and who had been attested as the Son of God by the Father's voice at His baptism in the waters of the Jordan.

The sacrament of Baptism was the outward and visible sign and seal of his doctrine. "I baptize," he says, "with water unto repentance," but "He who stood amongst them, whom they as yet knew not, would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

Such, in substance, was the preaching of the Baptist, both doctrinal and practical. Who reads the Gospel and does not know how wide and profound an impression it made on the minds of his contemporaries, and how the way was thus opened up for our Lord's ministry, who began precisely where His forerunner left off?

II.

After having given such decided and uncompromising attestation to the Divine character and saving work of

Christ, the embassy of his two disciples, with their mandate to question Jesus as to His Messiahship, does seem very strange, and has puzzled attentive readers not a little, some of whom seem to see in it a real indication of doubt and wavering in the Baptist's mind. For, they ask, what other purpose had he if not to lay at rest perplexing thoughts which had cast him into dejection and gloom?

Others suggest that his object was to put an end to the doubts of his own disciples regarding Christ's claims and office, to which before he had borne ample and striking testimony, but the idea of which some way or other they were unwilling to entertain.

St. John's character and teaching came up to the highest ideal of that age, and hence the unbounded enthusiasm and devotion in which he was regarded by his own followers. The envy or jealousy which they accordingly entertained toward the growing reputation and popularity of Jesus comes out in one passage, when they came to their master and said, "Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold! the same baptizes, and all men come to Him."

John, to be sure, found it hard to break them off from their prejudices and undue devotion to himself. He would, therefore, naturally resort to the method described to you in the Gospel, in order to open their mind and produce proper convictions, because, by going in person and obtaining such proofs as the Saviour was likely to give, light would dawn apace, and the glory of the Lord's character and work would become the more apparent to them.

Of the fond attachment of his disciples we can have no better evidence than the fact of their close attendance

upon him during the long months of his imprisonment in the fortress of Machærus, the confinement or incarceration of ancient times not being so rigorous as to preclude the friendly intercourse and society of his followers, just as you see in the case of Socrates amongst the Athenians.

But notwithstanding the alleviations of his imprisonment there was room for religious despondency, and the question might be partly prompted from this cause, since John, attaching importance to the outward colouring, and not quite penetrating to the pure spirituality of the theocratic notions of an elect people, might regard the Advent of the Messiah as the signal for the rectifying of all the manifold disorders and wrongs of that age. He would thus, as months passed over him in his confinement, grow impatient of his own deliverance, which he surely calculated on from his notion of the imminency of the Messianic kingdom.

At all events, he could enter into and sympathize with the doubts of his followers, although, as there is good reason to believe, he might have had no doubts himself. Hence, learn in some cases the legitimacy of doubt as not being necessarily a blamable or sinful condition of mind, since St. Thomas, too, was allowed to doubt, and other very holy and good men have at all times fallen into a state of perplexity and strange questionings of heart, more especially in presence of moral evil, penetrating and perverting, as it does, every energy and relationship of human life, too often rampant, and, as in the case of St. John the Baptist, triumphant over goodness. It is often hard to discern the Divine love and righteousness in the midst of abounding wickedness.

Inquiry generally begins with doubt. Doubt is its

main starting point; and if doubt lead to honest and persevering inquiry, it is a positive good and not an evil, since light emerges amidst the darkness, and a firmer persuasion, a faith not easily shaken, is the happy consequence. Before you can overcome and divest your minds of prepossessions and irrational conventionalities, you must learn, like the Baptist's disciples, to look facts straight in the face, to weigh circumstances and proofs with calmness and impartiality, apart alike from the fervour and precipitancy of passion, from the sloth of self-indulgence, and from personal interests. Otherwise the Baptist's followers would have remained bound up in their master, and would have formed a distinct sect, as we know from history some of the narrower and more bigoted of them did, and so would not have attached themselves to Christ, as was the case, in all probability, with the majority of them. Their dulness of spiritual perception was, however, a cause of grief and despondency to their master, because if with the opportunities they enjoyed from constant intercourse and instruction from him, they were so hard to bring over to belief in the Lord's Messiahship, what must become of others who were without these advantages? But indeed their convictions were all the truer and stronger from their previous doubting. Still, it was not a very promising sign of the time that the people were the more willing to venerate and attach themselves to the austere moral ideal of St. John the Baptist rather than to the cheerful and sunny side of religion which Jesus Christ set before them.

III.

When the embassy of the two disciples came to Christ and put the memorable question, "Art Thou He who should come, or do we look for another?" He did not give, as many might expect, a categorical and direct answer. The dominant religious craving of the age was after extraordinary signs or prodigies from heaven, with which requisition He complied, neither in this case nor afterwards, when the Pharisees gaped after them. He gave them proofs, full and unmistakable, from which to form their own conclusions, and this is just what you have now. No voice from heaven reaches your ears, nor portents from the sky meet your gaze, but the facts of Holy Scripture and of historical Christianity are presented to you. You have also the facts of the religious consciousness of humanity, and of your own inner experience, presenting a complete circle of most convincing evidence, calculated, on fair consideration, to scatter the darkness and to rectify the mistakes of the most prejudiced and the narrowest intellect.

The supernatural facts of Christ's life were patent to all. The two messengers saw them with their own eyes, the blind receiving sight, the lame walking, the lepers being cleansed, the deaf made to hear, the dead raised up.

Now what, to a Jewish mind, was most convincing in all this would be the palpable fulfilment of prophecy, since Isaiah had said, eight hundred years previously, that in the coming age the eyes of the blind should be opened, the ears of the deaf should be unstopped; then the lame should leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.

Not merely were the Baptist's disciples to report to

him what they had seen with their own eyes, but they were to narrate what they had heard with their own ears, to wit, that "the poor have the gospel preached to them," in which they would be ready to mark the accomplishment of another notable prophecy quoted elsewhere in the Gospels, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach glad tidings to the poor," amongst the particulars of which "the acceptable year of the Lord" had a foremost place.

Whereas to the Jewish intellect and associations the word of prophecy was a surer proof than even the most astounding miracles; He goes on to suggest those passages in which God's plan of salvation is characterized as a stumbling block to the heedless and unwary, "Blessed is he who shall not be offended in Me," that is, those to whom the Saviour's mean and despised appearance, or the poverty of His followers, or the severity of His reproofs, or the self-denial of His precepts, or the doctrine of the Cross should not prove a stumbling-block.

Such was the sum and substance of proof presented to St. John the Baptist's disciples, perfectly suitable to their frame of mind and stage of religious knowledge and experience. You, as I said before, have additional proofs, suitable to your advanced culture, as the harmony of the parts and the scope of the whole series of Scripture revelations, together with the self-evidencing power of truth in the Christian consciousness.

IV.

That men might not, from this mission of inquiry, form an unfavourable opinion of the Baptist, as if he

were unsettled or wavering in his convictions, the victim of a morbid doubting and despair of better things, our Lord, after the messengers had gone away, vindicated his character from all possible aspersions on this score.

“For what,” says He, “went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?”—some weak and unstable character who changed his opinions to suit the current and shifting maxims and predilections of society, who closely watched and went in with every breath of popular favour and humour—what in these modern days you would call a trimmer, with no fixed principles, either in religion or in politics? Surely they all knew that the Baptist was of the very opposite type of character and temperament, thoroughly consistent and unshaken in his views, though sympathetic with others in their doubts, and otherwise, reasonable and large-hearted, a man of iron will and indomitable resolution, who proclaimed the moral heinousness of the king’s conduct in the market-place before the multitude, and to his own face, to the imminent peril of his life.

For St. John was no courtier, currying favour with the great by the sacrifice of his own feelings and sense of right, although his abilities might have recommended him for the highest and most responsible office in the palace or cabinet, had his character been but a little more pliable or elastic, and he could have conformed somewhat to court conventionality and etiquette. As it was, he spurned the purple and the soft raiment of the courtier, and having incurred Herod’s displeasure because of his uncompromising denunciation of eternal righteousness which is the same for rich and poor in all places and stations of life, he now lay languishing in a

dungeon with such alleviations of imprisonment as Eastern despots indulged the victims of their caprice.

But, as I may be trespassing on your time and indulgence, I shall merely now mention the positive aspect in which the Lord taught His contemporaries to regard St. John, to wit, that of a prophet, which in the language of Scripture means a preacher; and without doubt your Lord's precursor was one of the greatest and most popular preachers, whether of olden or of modern times.

But the Saviour emphasizes, amplifies, reiterates, "Yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet."

One important respect in which he was greater than the other prophets consisted in the fact that he was the object of prophecy. "For this is he of whom it is written," thus striking, as you see, another chord in the Jewish heart.

Well, then, beloved, since preaching was the great instrument for preparing the Jewish Church for Christ's first advent, so the same machinery of evangelization is invaluable now for placing the world in an attitude of expectancy for His second coming.

Repentance and faith are the two watchwords of our blessed Evangel, in which all other saving doctrines and duties are bound up.

It is the office and privilege of the ministers and stewards of the Divine mysteries to "turn the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just," and in this way to "prepare and make ready" a people willing and acceptable in the day of the Lord's power.

Oh! keep in mind that the cry of repentance, which St. John the Baptist raised with such wonderful effect, denotes a thorough revolution and regeneration of moral character, which can be brought about no other way

than by saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, through the omnipotent energy of His love working in your inmost hearts, and transforming you in inner affection and will as well as in the more outward issues of your life.

XVIII.

The Divinity of the Infant Saviour Harmoniously Attested by the Lessons, The Epistle, and the Gospel of Christmas day.

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given : and the government shall be upon his shoulder ; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace."

ISAIAH ix. 6.

IT will be worth while briefly to consider how aptly and harmoniously the great event you celebrate to-day is brought under your notice in both the Old and the New Testament lessons, as well as in the Gospel and Epistle.

That which, in the passage before you, is predicated of the Child born, is conclusive of His Divine nature, since He is called "the Mighty God."

What were the tidings brought by the angel to the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem? Why, the good news that there was born, as on this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord.

Now, as you know, the New Testament name Lord answers to the Old Testament name Jehovah, and at once explains to you that venerable predicate of the Child born, as on this day, given to Him in this passage of the prophet, "the Everlasting Father," which would otherwise appear so puzzling.

That, further, the Child might be impressively notified to you in Gospel times as "the Prince of Peace," another predicate given Him by the prophet, the multitude of the heavenly host proclaimed a gospel or good news of "peace on earth," on the occasion of His birth.

As if to assure you further that the Babe of Bethlehem is "the Mighty God," the Jehovah of the Old Testament, "the Everlasting Father," your attention is directed, both in the Epistle and the Gospel of to-day, to His pre-existent state, and to the wonders of creation which are His handiwork.

For what says the Epistle? Why, that this "Man-Child" is the Heir of all things, by Whom also God made the worlds or ages; that "the splendour of the Father's glory and the express image of His person" are revealed in Him.

What, too, says the Gospel? Why, that He Who as at this time "was made flesh," was in the beginning with God, and was God. All things were made by Him. Without Him there is no creaturely life or existence whatsoever.

Well, then, since the Infant of to-day is so palpably set before you as the Maker of all things, the further predicate of government in the prophetic passage will not be surprising, "The government shall be upon His shoulders," which predicate the Epistle of to-day corroborates, "He upholdeth all things by the word of His power"; which He Himself tells you is an actual fact, "All power is given Me in heaven and earth"; which St. Paul also affirms, "He is given as Head over all to His Church," "He must reign till He has put all His enemies under His feet"; which the prophet Daniel, too, emphasizes, "His dominion is everlasting: His kingdom shall never be destroyed."

Being from the beginning "the Lord" or Jehovah, He is the singular or unique Revealer of the invisible God, the only Mediator between God and man under both dispensations.

For there is not one God of the Old Testament and another of the New, as Marcion so fondly thought, as certain new-fangled innovators of modern times would also be fain to affirm, to the disparagement of the one and to the vain magnifying of the other. He appeared to the Patriarchs, in those wonderful theophanies, the narrative of which is so romantic and charming to the reader. For, as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews tells you, He not only supports on His shoulders the government of all things which He has created, but apart from Him there never has been, and probably, in the nature of things, never could be, a visible or sensible manifestation of the invisible and impatible Deity.

How profoundly grateful, therefore, ought you to be that all other revelations of the unseen God "to the olden Fathers, at sundry times and in divers manners," are consentient and meet together in the Child of Bethlehem, in Whom you behold the final and full-blown revelation, of which those to the prophets were only the adumbrations or shadows.

Nature and grace, the Old Testament and the New, are thus reconciled in the light of the event of this day. Therefore, in thinking of it, hundreds of years previously, the prophet's mind dwelt upon this very aspect of clearer light or revelation, which, in the fulness of time, was to dawn, to illumine and gladden the hearts of men, the obscurities of the previous dispensation being finally cleared up, the mystery of the Divine counsel for the salvation of mankind, hid for ages and generations, being

plainly discovered in the historic incidents of Christmas. "The people who walked in darkness saw a great light: upon them who dwelt in the shadow of death the light shone" with transcendent brilliance.

Quite conformable to this apprehension of the prophet is the concept and definition given by the Evangelist in the Gospel of to-day. "In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness," though the darkness, in part at least, did not comprehend it.

The Saviour, born, as on this day, in the city of David, being the Lord or the Jehovah, the Revealer of God in both dispensations, Himself, in the language of the prophet, "the Mighty God," the wonders of Whose power you contemplate in the spheres both of nature and of grace; the Lord Who will finally redeem the created universe from the bondage of the corruption which is superinduced and foreign to it, an intruder, a fungus or cancer, preying upon the vitals of humanity, how fitting it is that in that grand old song of the "Three Children" you should call upon all your fellow creatures, on the very inanimate creation, in all parts of it, in every domain, all His works whatsoever, which are to share with you in the final regeneration or restitution of all things, "to bless the Lord, to praise Him and magnify Him for ever."

This grand old song is well fitted to expand your conceptions both of the creative and redemptive power of the Saviour Babe. For in the succession of His works, whose praises you invoke, you will find that the angels and the highest heavens themselves, the regions of celestial verities, occupy a first place.

But, as if to bring the truth still more home to you, the Church has selected as the first of the proper psalms

of to-day, the nineteenth of your collection, which has such an impressive charm for you from your childhood upward, in which you first sing, "The heavens declare the glory of God," born as on this day, "and the firmament sheweth His handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech; night unto night sheweth knowledge"; this revelation being co-extensive with people of every language or nationality on earth.

In the second place, you are called upon to celebrate that more perfect revelation of Him in His word. "The law of the Lord," the Saviour Babe, "is perfect, converting the soul. The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart. The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eye."

There is, further, that glorious and still more immediate and direct revelation of Himself to your spiritual consciousness, in the outward signs and pledges of His love and personal communication of Himself to you, by the way of His own appointment, the administration of the Lord's Supper, to which you are all at this season so kindly and lovingly invited by God Himself.

XIX.

The Manifestation of Christ in Nature.

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, behold there came wise men from the East, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the East and are come to worship Him," etc.

ST. MATTHEW ii. 1-10.

I.

YOU have entered on Epiphany or the season of the Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles.

A touching commemoration of the visit of the Magi used, until very recently, to be observed in the Chapel Royal of St. James's Palace by the King, who, on Epiphany, offered costly gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, which the Dean received from his hand and placed on the Communion Table.

Consider the deep meaning of this custom. The gold is an acknowledgment that the Babe of Bethlehem is King; the frankincense that He is God; the myrrh that, though King and God, He is by death a propitiation for the sin of the world.

An interesting tradition is that these three Persian magi were baptized by St. Thomas, and became evangelists; that after a prosperous ministry they received the crown of martyrdom; that they bore the names of Gaspar, Melchior, and Belthazar; and that their mortal remains are to this day piously preserved in a silver

shrine enriched with gems of great value, within the Cathedral of Cologne.

But besides this Gospel of the manifestation of Christ by a star, as King and God, and a propitiatory sacrifice, all the other Gospels of this season are so many forms of manifestation of His Divine nature and power.

There are two great events in special of such manifestation in Christ's life. First, like a dove the Holy Spirit descended at His baptism in Jordan, as it is told you in the New Testament Lesson for the morning of Epiphany. A voice from the heavenly sanctuary addressed Him as the Beloved Son in Whom God was well pleased, suggesting the Universal Fatherhood and Sonship, by virtue of which the Gentiles should be fellow heirs and of the same body, sharers of the promises, the very mystery hid from the beginning in God.

The other Gospel incident in which Christ notably manifested His glory is the first miracle He wrought in Cana of Galilee, a happy result of which was that His disciples believed on Him. Marriage an ordinance of nature; the kingdom of the Redeemer, co-extensive with the realm of nature; Christ the Lord of nature, of the seasons, of the forces, processes, and laws by which the vine grows and matures fruit, and the juice of the grape is converted into that grateful beverage which maketh glad the heart of man!

If He Who is born King of the Jews be the Lord of the whole earth, and can concentrate its manifold powers of productiveness into a single momentary act, then it is plain the Gentiles have a direct interest in Him, since they already live of His bounty, and His tender mercies are over all His works, His grace sustaining the universe every moment.

II.

What, then, are some of the lessons taught in the Gospel before you this morning?

That your minds may be influenced and wills moved to good altogether outside of the sphere of the positive institutions and ordinances of the Church!

(1) An extraordinary meteor or star led those Magi to Christ. Through an object like those others with which their minds were familiar they were led to salvation. Their astrology was the finger of God pointing out the way.

(2) The shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem, much conversant with the appearances of the sky and weather, heard divinest harmony in the gales of heaven. Sublime strains were wafted to them on the winds. The airy shapes of countless angelic spirits presented themselves to their rapt vision. And "they said the one to the other, 'Come, let us go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known to us.'"

And so, (3) through the associations of the military profession, the Roman centurion of the Gospel of the Third Sunday after the Epiphany was led to Christ. He looked abroad upon the wide universe, and saw all its forces marshalled in most complete order, under the guidance and at the beck of one Supreme Will. Disease and other malignant influences, as well as the beneficent powers of nature, acknowledged the authority and did the bidding of Christ, just as the soldiers under the centurion showed implicit obedience to command.

(4) The sailor, too, recognizes God in the storm, as, when the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, as you read in the Gospel of the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany,

when their ship was overtaken by a sudden squall, and overwhelmed with waves, beheld Christ, awakened from His quiet slumber, rise up in the majesty of His Divine glory, and by His word restrain the fury of the tempest. The prayer of the disciples, "Lord, save us, we perish," is the natural utterance of the mariner amidst the extreme perils of the deep. The most solemn realities are then forcibly brought home to him. He seriously thinks of what is beyond the watery billows, and commends his soul to Christ, Whose glory in response to the prayer of faith is not unfrequently manifested by his signal deliverance.

Each in his own way, through the daily business and associations of life most familiar to him, is led to Christ.

There is one obvious duty from what has been said. Like the wise men, seek to cherish observant and reflective minds. Observation suggests, reflection gives a firm grasp of the deeper truths of science, and leads the thoughts onward to the First Cause of all. The strange meteor in the sky might arrest the attention of the curious, but, if viewed disconnectedly, apart from other facts of God's wonderful universe, if it had not suggested the Star of Promise, it would have remained an object of curiosity, and had no practical influence for good; whereas you know otherwise in the case of these men.

III.

Consider, therefore, the further lessons here taught you. The best test of the reality of your religion is the practical result to which it gives rise.

Do the spiritual truths you apprehend have a direct influence and lead to a corresponding course of action?

What great efforts do you make to live consistently and to carry out your convictions to practical issues?

Behold these Magi! What a long journey over the trackless desert did they not undertake? What toils and hardships did they not undergo? What dangers and difficulties did they not encounter? It was on peril of life that they traversed a pathless wilderness, exposed to the attacks of wild beasts and of predatory bands, the costly presents they bore presenting a rich booty to the marauding Bedouin.

St. Paul, too, was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. You know the long succession of privations and horrors to which he willingly submitted for the sake of Christ, labouring and suffering more abundantly than the other Apostles, however manly and heroic they were.

It is, therefore, a pertinent question: How much do you endure for Christ? What work do you do? What sore travail and pains are you not contented to bear?

Another test of the realness of your religion is found in the feelings which accompany a right belief.

First, there is a disposition to communicate the knowledge and blessings you yourselves possess to others, as when the Magi made no secret of the object of their solicitude and search in the public squares and streets of Jerusalem, when the whole city was commoved with the tidings.

It is no impertinent question to ask yourselves and others: Where is He Who is born King of the Jews? And if your knowledge be fuller and more perfect, your responsibility and obligation to impart it is all the greater.

But, secondly, the Magi were filled with thankfulness. Their knowledge of the only begotten Son of God, the King of Israel, begat in them an unspeakable joy, the full fruition of which will only then be attained, when the perfections of the glorious Godhead are clearly

unveiled in the life above, when God, seen as in a mirror here, will be beheld face to face there.

“When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” Should not your joy and thankfulness be proportionate to your greater lights and privileges?

True piety makes a merry heart. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are the spontaneous tribute of a soul truly susceptible and appreciative of the infinite mercies and grace of God in Christ. Do you rejoice with exceeding great joy over the events of redemption?

Rejoicing is good. Adoration is better. But the substantial tributes of your gratitude will further attest your loyalty and devotion to the King and Lord of the whole earth: now a lowly Babe in the manger among the dumb beasts: again crowned with thorns and arrayed in purple: anon hanging on the Cross of shame, with the inscription over Him, in Latin, in Greek, and in Hebrew, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews”: thereafter exalted to the throne above, “for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour.”

Never, however, forget that all adoration and costly tribute is comparatively vain and worthless if you withhold your hearts or thorough entire dedication of yourselves to Him.

Hear what the Apostle says in the Epistle for to-day: “I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

It is a holocaust which God requires from you. Your humbler members and capacities, together with the higher, are to be placed at His disposal, and used in His service.

Does “the love of Christ constrain you to live no longer to yourselves, but to Him Who loved you and gave Himself for you?”

XX.

The Marriage Feast at Cana.

"There was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; and the mother of Jesus was there: and both Jesus was called and His disciples," etc.

ST. JOHN ii. 1-11.

I.

BELOVED, there is hardly a fact in the Gospels to the appreciation of which a knowledge of Eastern customs and surroundings is not required.

For example, at the marriage at Cana (1) the master of the feast is a leading character, corresponding to whom there is no such functionary in Western countries.

(2) Orientals, when they dine, or partake of any other meal, recline on mats spread on the floor. Each mat accommodates three persons. These mats are placed round a circular piece of leather, on which is set a stool, which supports the dish containing the food, of which all partake. The middle mat, and the middle position of each mat, are regarded as the more honourable places. To arrange the guests at the banquet, and otherwise to preside over the ceremonies, was the duty of the special functionary called "the master of the feast." Unless the house was very large, it does not appear how a very great marriage company like that

in the present case gathered together could be accommodated.

(3) Another interesting feature of this narrative is the mention of the six empty water-pots, which indeed play a prominent part in the miracle. We are not told how many unemptied ones besides, but the contents of these six had been already spent in the frequent ablutions which are usual amongst the Easterns. The Jewish custom of pouring water upon the hands and arms before meals is described by those conversant in antiquarian research, and must have been particularly refreshing and acceptable in a sultry climate.

Each of these earthenware jars, which the drawer of water was wont to carry upon the shoulder, contained, the Evangelist tells you, two or three firkins apiece, that is, close upon eighteen or twenty-seven gallons, or seventy-two or one hundred and eight quarts, so that there had been little short of six hundred quarts of water already used for the above-mentioned purpose of ablution, and the same quantity converted into wine at the word of Jesus, the empty vessels having been filled up to the very brim. According to the happy conceit of young Milton, "The water blushed and owned its Lord" on quite a large scale.

A further particular in the setting of the picture is the time mentioned. It was the third day of the marriage feast, the celebration of which not unfrequently extended over seven or eight days. Hence, in a large and generous company, a great quantity of wine might be well spent by the third day, especially when you consider that so sultry a climate causes an almost inextinguishable thirst. Hence, also, for the next four or five days there would be required a considerable quantity, the six full water-pots not being thought an

extraordinary consumpt for so large a company, especially as some conjecture the particular wine used did not possess intoxicating qualities.

II.

The first lesson to be gathered from the miracle is the aspect of prevailing cheerfulness under which religion is here presented. The genius of Christianity is smiling and benignant. It invests life with the roseate hues of love, and spreads over it the gaily coloured rainbow of hope. It brings joy and gladness into the most intimate of human relationships, blessing and sanctifying all innocent home pleasures and social joys. As Christ adorned and beautified the marriage at Cana with His presence and first miracle, so it should be your diligent care, in whatever festivities you are called on to share, that your character and conduct be of such worthiness as to grace and do honour to the company and ceremony.

Above all, keep in mind the deep truth that earthly marriage signifies and represents unto you the union betwixt Christ and His Church, and that to those who have the gift of spiritual discernment, your other earthly relationships, equally with the conjugal, are types and figures of the heavenly.

Christianity thus presents to you an ideal of character and moral excellence which is to be realized amidst the daily converse, society, and avocations of life, by sympathy and active interest in all innocent joys and pursuits, but, above all, amidst the amenities and sanctities of domestic life.

What an instructive contrast is here presented to a certain false ideal, sometime entertained, both in our Lord's day and in the succeeding centuries down to our

own time, which at the present is mistakingly venerated and held in honour by your Roman Catholic neighbours in the practices of asceticism, celibacy, and the monastic life. This contrast of the two religious ideals which have been current in the Christian world throughout the centuries cannot have a simpler and more beautiful statement than in the words of Christ Himself: "John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, and ye say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man came both eating and drinking, and ye say, Behold a winebibber and a gluttonous person, a friend of publicans and sinners!"

III.

A second lesson from the miracle is to recognize the Divine hand and presence in your daily bread, and in the other gifts and bounties of Providence spread out for your entertainment and comfort. For, after all, God and Christ are as near and present in the ordinary and common as in the extraordinary and startling. Indeed, you can read the Divine ideas as well in the calm and regular phenomena of nature and of life as in what seems more capricious and irregular, in the dewdrop and the tiniest moss or blade of grass equally with the lightning flash that scorches the cedars of Libanus, in the slow formation of a sandbank or gravel beach as in those underground upheavals which make Mount Bashan and Sirion to skip like a wild goat or unicorn.

Wherefore did our Lord change water into wine but to teach you that His Divine power is present in the more gradual and uniform processes of nature, in the wonderful laboratory of vegetable life, whereby each plant selects and manipulates to its own uses those

particular substances from the earth it stands in need of. You will have acquired a useful and wise habit of observation, if with the return of spring you discern the Lord's work in every bursting bud. But if you want to be familiar with some of the more wonderful phenomena of vegetation, you will make the vine a special study, since there you will see some of the vegetative functions in their most vigorous and elaborate forms. The amazing force and rapidity with which it sends forth its young shoots, the strong current and pressure of the sap which is afterwards by its elaboration to contribute to the formation of the grape is perfectly wonderful. Well, then, when you contemplate closely and lose yourselves in amazement at the admirable design, economy, and plastic power of nature, you will find the secret of it all in the creative word of Him, who on this memorable occasion of His earthly history, commanded the domestic servants at the marriage feast at Cana to fill the earthenware jars with water, and therefrom to draw out and bear wine to the master of the ceremonies.

IV.

A third lesson is contained in the power of character shown in the restraint of miraculous energy for so long a time. Jesus Christ had never yet of His own free will manifested His inherent and native glory, although on two separate occasions the Father had manifested it to Him, to wit: (1) by the miraculous star to the Magi; and (2) by the dove-like descent of the Holy Ghost and the marvellous voice from Heaven at His baptism. Hence the name Epiphany given to these manifestations which you celebrate at this season.

Well, then, for the long period of thirty years He chose to live in obscurity, in the quiet and retirement of His Nazareth home, and in the faithful fulfilment of all relative duties. In the midst of rural scenes and homely pursuits, His character gradually matured, His moral nature grew robust and vigorous. The strife of life lay before Him in all its dread grandeur and unique reality, with the certainty of eventual victory, but He sought not to anticipate His triumph. He patiently waited God's time and diligently prepared Himself. Thirty years in the conscious possession of omnificent energy, content to be humble and of no repute, when a single putting forth of His will might have brought Him unbounded popularity and influence. There are indeed strange stories of His boyish miracles, as, for example, when He and His playmates made birds of clay, those of His making took wing and flew away, real birds. But such a putting forth of creative energy in the days of His boyhood is altogether legendary.

Beloved, there is no greater real power than in the self-restraint of the undue eagerness or immoderate ardour to which generous youth is so naturally subject, in the exercise of patience and diligent appliance of those means of improvement which in the good providence of God have been placed within your reach. Oh, be sure that by over haste or impetuosity you may frustrate the best ends, it being the greatest wisdom calmly to abide God's time, assured that if you faithfully do your part now, however obscure your position or depressing your outward surroundings, "He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your just dealing as the noonday."

V.

A fourth lesson is conveyed in the saying, "Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine, and when men have well drunk then that which is worse : but thou hast kept the good wine until now," to wit, the contrast of the world's giving to the manner of God's giving. The world gives its best first, pleasure, flattery, blandishment, the glitter and titillation of false joys, after which follow accumulating dissatisfaction, bitter regrets, an accusing conscience, the stings of guilt, the horrors of remorse, and unutterable despair.

God, on the other hand, gives the worst first, the best afterwards. The sorrows of contrition, the toils of repentance, the struggle with and conquest of almost inveterately evil propensities and habits, and the other arduous disciplines of virtue, in due time bring with them inner feelings of intense pleasure, a grateful sense of praiseworthiness and merit, a consciousness of Divine favour, and an anticipation of an eternal recompense.

In all these ways, then, the Divine glory of Christ is ordinarily manifested : (1) in the sanctity of marriage which typifies the close union of Himself with His spouse the Church ; (2) in the recognition of His presence in the operations of nature, in the growth of vegetation, and in the ripening of the fruit, in the harvest home, and in the vintage, processes gathered up and concentrated in one point at the marriage feast ; (3) in His accustomed restraint of Divine power for long periods, when it might have been exerted in judgment on the ungodly, and in supernatural interference on behalf of oppressed virtue and a desecrated Church. For thirty years He withheld the manifestation of His glory ; and (4) in the saying of the Master of the feast,

“Thou hast kept the good wine until now,” is shadowed forth that economy of discipline whereby the character is matured, a probation which is arduous in its first beginnings, though even then not without sweet compensating solaces, which grows increasingly easy and pleasant, brightening and consoling until it is fulfilled in the bliss of a sanctified humanity. The cup of salvation, the wine with Christ in His kingdom indefinitely surpasses in excellence whatever other sweets of Divine pleasure you had previously tasted.

XXI.

Trumpets and Sunday Bells.

"Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound."

PSALM lxxxix. 15.

SUNDAY bells! With what happy and joyful feelings are they not associated!

What Sunday bells are to you, the two silver trumpets were to the Hebrews.

These trumpets were consecrated, just as church bells or other appurtenances of the public worship of God are now.

Let us see the several uses to which they were put, in order to understand the happiness of those who heard them. Only distinctly keep in mind that "the joyful sound" in the passage now before you, means the blast of the consecrated trumpets.

I.

These trumpets were, in the first place, used for the calling of the assembly of the Hebrews, just as church bells are now. "When they blow with them, all the congregation shall assemble at the door of the tabernacle."

The public solemnities of the Jewish worship were

associated with very happy social feelings and national memories, just as your church services are.

"When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me; for I had gone with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude who kept holiday." So says the psalmist.

Isaiah also testifies to the joyfulness of the occasion. "Ye shall have a song as in the night, when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come unto the mountain of the Lord, to the Mighty One of Israel."

How welcome and exhilarating to you is this day of rest, a needful release from the cares and worries of life, with which most of you are sufficiently burdened! Your nature craves for relaxation, as well as for the sympathy and delights of religious fellowship. From blessed experience, you can all zealously join in the holy cry against the desecration of the Lord's Day by secular pursuits and pleasures. How sweet, in particular to the weary labourer, is the Sunday's release from toil, so beautifully described by a Scottish clergyman, James Grahme, in his poem, "The Sabbath"!

"Hail! Sabbath, thee I hail the poor man's day!
On other days, the man of toil is doom'd
To eat his joyless bread, lonely; the ground
Both seat and board; screened from the winter's cold
And summer's heat by neighbouring hedge or tree.
But on this day, embosomed in his home,
He shares the frugal meal with those he loves;
With those he loves he shares the heart-felt joy
Of giving thanks to God.
But now his steps a welcome sound invites;
Solemn the knell from yonder ancient pile
Fills all the air, inspiring joyful awe.
Slowly the throng moves o'er the tomb-paved ground,
The aged man, the bowed down, the blind
Led by the thoughtless boy, and he who breathes

With pain, and eyes the new-made grave, well pleased :
These mingled with the young, the gay, approach
The house of God ; these, spite of all their ills,
A glow of gladness feel ; with silent praise
They enter in. . . . A pause ensues :
The organ breathes its distant thunder notes,
Then swells into a diapason full ;
The people rising, sing, with harp, with harp,
And voice of psalms ; harmoniously attuned
The various voices blend ; the long-drawn aisles
At every close, the lingering strains prolong.
Again, the organ peal, loud rolling, meets
The hallelujahs of the choir. . . . Afar they float,
Wafting glad tidings to the sick man's couch ;
Raised on his arm, he lists the cadence close,
And thinks he hears it still ; his heart is cheered :
He smiles on death ; but ah ! a wish will rise—
Would I were now beneath that echoing roof !”

II.

You will now see further cause for blessed memories and joyful feelings, when you consider the other uses of the consecrated trumpets.

They were, in the second place, blown over the sacrificial offerings of the Hebrews. “In the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginnings of your months, you shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings, that they may be to you for a memorial before the Lord your God.”

The seventh month amongst the Jews had special festivities, for in it occurred the great yearly festival of the Atonement, on which day a goat and bullock were, with more than ordinary solemnity, sacrificed, first, for the sins of the high-priest, then for the sins of the whole people, he once a year entering the most Holy Place, and

sprinkling the blood of the victims on the mercy-seat and on the altar of incense. In Lev. xxiii. 24, you read, "In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, shall ye have a sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, an holy convocation."

Shall not your Sunday bells in like manner remind, and make you happy at the thought of the great sacrifice for sin once for all offered up, "the perfect oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world," the "Lamb slain from the foundation of all things, in the foreknowledge and predestination of God, which most surely taketh away all sin?"

When you come to the house of God every Sunday with the consciousness of your shortcomings, your sins of commission and of omission, of heedlessness and of ignorance, of hasty tempers and rash words, of uncharitable feelings and irreverent spirits, what thought should be uppermost if not that of the atonement which Christ accomplished, whereby you obtain remission of your sins, and all other benefits of His Passion, and through whom a way of access is opened up into the Holiest?

"Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled," are ideas which at once rise up at the thought of this sacrifice, and make your approach to the Throne of Grace full of boldness and confidence. You feel you can draw near to a reconciled Father in Christ Jesus.

There is no happier feeling than the sense of forgiveness, which the sinner experiences at the thought of the atoning work of the Son of God, the consciousness of the Father's love thence arising, knowing Him to be "faithful and just to forgive sin, and to cleanse from all unrighteousness" those who confess their misdeeds

with lowly, penitent, and contrite hearts, in the name and through the mediation of Jesus Christ.

“ O, the wisdom of the Eternal !
 O, the depth of Love divine !
 O, the sweetness of that mercy
 Which in Jesus Christ did shine !
 We were sinners, doomed to die,
 Jesus paid the penalty.”

III.

The use of the sacred trumpets on the year of jubilee is, in the third place, most memorable. I cannot do better than begin with the description of the poet already quoted.

“ Yes, the trumpet’s voice
 The Sabbath of the Jubilee announced :
 The freedom-freighted blast through all the land
 At once in every city echoing rings,
 From Lebanon to Carmel’s woody cliffs,
 So loud that all within the desert’s verge
 The couching lion starts and stares around.
 Free is the bondman now ; each one returns
 To his inheritance : The man, grown old
 In servitude ; far from his native fields,
 Hastes, joyous on his way : no hills are steep,
 Smooth is his rugged path ; his little ones
 Sport as they go, whilst oft the mother chides
 The lingering step, lured by the wayside flowers ;
 At length the hill, from which a farewell look,
 And still another parting look, he cast
 On his paternal vale, appears in view ;
 The summit gained, throbs hard his heart with joy
 And sorrow blent, to see that vale once more ;
 Instant his eye darts to the roof,
 Where first he saw the light : his youngest born
 He lifts, and, pointing to the much-loved spot,
 Says, ‘ there thy fathers lived, and there they sleep.’ ”

The trumpets of jubilee were sounded every fiftieth

year, on the very day of atonement to which, in the last section, we referred.

“Thou shalt number seven sabbaths of years unto thee. Then thou shalt cause the trumpet of the jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month: on the day of atonement shall ye make the trumpet to sound through all your land. And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all your land, unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a jubilee unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession and every man unto his family. A jubilee shall the fiftieth year be to you: ye shall not sow nor reap that which groweth of itself; ye shall eat the increase thereof out of the field.”

And do not Sunday bells make your heart glad at the thought of the enormous debt of sin cancelled, freedom recovered, the gratuitous and unbounded mercy and provisions of grace provided for all?

1. What heavier debt than that the sinner contracts by his transgression! The law would shut you up in prison until you paid all the huge debt of guilt which has all your life long been accumulating from your many and repeated sins. But the Lord comes and freely forgives you it all. Wherefore your life ought henceforth to be one of gratitude and self-surrender to God, and of love and forgiveness to one another.

2. The life of gratitude and love to God is one of liberty and enlargement. Thus the gospel brings to you emancipation from the fetters and hindrances of sin. “You love to run in the way of God’s commandments, because He has enlarged your heart.” The spirit of sonship to which you have been restored is one of freedom from the bondage of the law, from its curse and penalty. “If the Son make you free then are ye free

indeed." But your freedom is one of bondage to the law of righteousness. "Being freed from sin, and enslaved to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life."

3. As the Hebrew slave at the proclamation of the jubilee returned to his home and family, so at the gospel call you find your home in the bosom of God. You see His loving arms outstretched to welcome you. You are filled with joy in the embraces of His love. You recover your lost heritage. You become heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. The kingdom of heaven is begun here and now in your hearts.

4. I need not enlarge on the spontaneous and free banquet of spirituals, which the Lord has provided for His emancipated ones in the sacraments and other ordinances of His Church. Let what the prophet Isaiah says suffice: "In this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees, well refined."

" The Lamb's high banquet called to share,
 Array'd in garments white and fair.
 The Red Sea past, we fain would sing
 To Jesus, our triumphant King.
 O, all sufficient sacrifice !
 Beneath Thee hell defeated lies :
 Thy captive people are set free,
 And crowns of life restored by Thee."

IV.

The blast of the trumpets was, in the fourth place, the signal of war and the token of victory. "When ye blow an alarm, then the camps that lie on the east of the tabernacle shall go forward : when ye blow an alarm

the second time, the camps that lie on the south side shall take their journey." And so of the other two divisions of the Hebrew host. "They shall blow an alarm for their journeys." And "if you go to war in your land against an enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets."

The Fathers of the early Church happily turned the things and events of the wilderness life of the Hebrews into figures of gospel realities. There is no more favourite figure of the Christian life than that of warfare. The baptized person becomes henceforth a "soldier of Christ," and is pledged to "fight manfully under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end."

And so the Fathers of the Christian Church likened the four Gospels to the four standards of the fourfold division of the Hebrew army. The Christian host marches under its four banners of lion, man, ox, and eagle, just as the Jewish Church had in adumbration done.

Sunday bells, therefore, are to you the joyful signals of successful warfare. "Your contest," which, under the Captain of your salvation, is assured of victory, is, says the apostle, "against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

The Church Catechism tells you that you must renounce, that is, hate and forsake utterly or account as your bitterest and most deadly foes, "the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanities of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh," in the sure confidence that if you do your part well, you will be more than conquerors through Christ.

V.

Note, in conclusion, that the Resurrection, the last assembling together of all the living and the dead from the beginning to the end of time, the unimaginably vast congregation before the heavenly tabernacle, will be heralded by the sound of trumpets, the New Testament figure being the antitype of the Hebrew usage.

The final victory over your last enemy will be celebrated in this way; conquest over death and Hades at last, just as over sin and guilt here and now.

Sunday bells chime the welcome news that "Christ is risen," Sunday being the weekly festival of that joyful event, bringing with it happy and exultant feelings. Surely at the last the sound of that trump which shall awake you from the sleep of death to a life of glory and immediate fellowship with saints, angels, and your glorified Redeemer, will be replete with consummate bliss.

"We which are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not prevent them that are asleep; for the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God." The apostle says, in another place, "Behold I show you a mystery! we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." Behold the closing signal for your corruptible putting on incorruption, your mortal being clothed with immortality, and death being swallowed up in victory,

" On the Resurrection morning
Soul and body meet again ;
No more sorrow, no more weeping,
No more pain !

Here awhile they must be parted,
And the flesh its sabbath keep,
Waiting in a holy stillness,
Wrapt in sleep.

For a while the tired body :
Lies with feet toward the morn ;
Till the last and brightest Easter
Day be born.

Soul and body reunited,
Thenceforth nothing shall divide,
Waking up in Christ's own likeness,
Satisfied.

On that happy Easter morning,
All the graves their dead restore ;
Father, sister, child, and mother
Meet once more.

To that brightest of all meetings
Bring us, Jesu Christ, at last ;
By Thy Cross through death and judgment,
Holding fast.

XXII.

“Christ Crucified.”

“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness, etc.”

1 CORINTHIANS i. 22-23.

NOTE St. Paul's philosophic and reflective cast of mind, how he generalizes facts and happily discriminates those features of character that are more peculiarly distinctive. “The Jews require a sign, the Greeks seek after wisdom.” The description is inimitable.

I.

Signs were suggested to the Jewish mind whenever that people thought of the past history of their nation. Almost every page of their sacred books spoke of signs either past or to come. Their faith had signs for its surest proof. Their greatest men had exhibited most startling signs. Those epochs to which they looked back with most pride were marked by a greater display of signs. And so it was no wonder that with the advent of the Messiah they expected signs in greater number and more surpassing brilliancy than ever before.

Indeed they had them in exceeding plenty, and that of a character such as from the past history of their

nation they might have expected. Jesus Christ of Nazareth confined His miracles to no one district, to no one section of the Jewish race above another. Everywhere, before all the people He did wonders, which in number, power, and beneficence surpassed anything of the kind that had ever occurred in their history.

The Jews, however, did not really know what they would be at. These miracles, indeed, were so many signs from heaven to them, but they were not signs to their mind. They wanted, forsooth, to see bright comets in the sky, and the Messiah coming to them in all the radiance of deity. And by and by, to their cost, they did see Him come to them in that way, since otherwise they would not recognize Him. At the destruction of Jerusalem, forty years later, He came to them in that way.

After a sort there was something very much to admire and commend in the desire of the Jews for signs. It shows the deep sense and feeling of the supernatural which their minds could not get over. Indeed, it was all engrossing with them, but it had at this time taken an altogether wrong direction, and so it fared very ill with them.

The belief in a living personal God above nature, whilst still present in it, working by, and through, and over it, when and how He pleases, is most salutary. But see how the mind of the Jews perverted it. So thoroughly selfish had that people become, that they viewed and made estimate of the most religious and holiest of things almost exclusively in reference to self. The present and living Jehovah, as it were, existed for them, not they for Him. The whole machinery of the spiritual world was at work for their special good. Their religious privileges were thus so much mere

matter, not for improvement and discipline, but for boasting and vain glory. How much good, beloved, will religion do to any people who look to it in that way?

The miracles of Jesus Christ did not dignify them. They were not, as those of Moses, the means of deliverance to them. The Roman soldiers had not been driven out of their country. The Roman tax gatherers and other civic officials had not been smitten with deadly plague or put to the sword. No emancipation, such as they cared for, had been wrought out for them. No conquests, no accessions of wealth, territory, or authority had been made. Individually or as a nation they had in no sense that they could understand been aggrandized. They had seen no signs to their mind, and so in St. Paul's time they continued to demand them, and still do so to this day.

II.

Next to the Jews there was no people in the world that St. Paul knew better than the Greeks. He had in his lifetime come much in contact with them. For he was a native of Tarsus in Cilicia, one of those Greek cities which from the earliest times had been scattered all over Asia Minor. At any rate it was an important shipping place, a constant resort of vessels from every part of Greece. The Greeks, a very commercial people, had colonies and cities on all the coasts of the Great Sea. Besides, since the conquests of Alexander the Great, they had been more than ever scattered over the world. Their subjugation by the Romans had also done much for their dispersion, so that in almost all places Greeks were to be met with. But what above all gave the people of other nations of that time more than an

ordinary interest in them, was that the Greek language had been almost everywhere diffused, and in Palestine and elsewhere had become the spoken and fashionable language, the language of commerce and of the courts of justice. It was therefore the language which our Lord and His disciples used. It was the language in which St. Paul preached and wrote his letters.

Besides, by this time that apostle had in his missionary tours come more closely in contact with them than ever before. He had passed through many of the greatest Grecian cities. He had already spent a year and a half at Corinth, which he had made the terminus of his second missionary journey, and where he had founded a flourishing Christian community; and to it from Ephesus, one of the greatest and most opulent of the Ionic cities of the Lesser Asia, where he resided and laboured for nearly three years, he now wrote his First Epistle, just as he was about to pay another visit to the Churches of Macedonia and other parts of Greece proper. So that he had enjoyed the best opportunities of observing the peculiarities of the different Grecian races, and of marking the characteristics that were common to them all. He had, like all other men, wondered at their genius. There was no feature more distinctive of the whole people than its intellectual aptitudes, which they never lost. Everywhere they kept strong hold of their national traditions. Their language remained through ages uncorrupted and unmutated. Much of their theology and culture was gathered from the Homeric poems, which were the heirloom of the whole race. They excelled in all the fine arts. They were masters in every branch of literature. "The Greeks," above every other people, "sought after wisdom."

There could be nothing equal to that description in

perspicuity and appreciation of national character. For the Greeks from hoar antiquity had been seekers of wisdom. Many of the maxims of the seven wise men are to this day household words. At a very early period the study of philosophy was still more systematically prosecuted. You have all heard of the various schools that in the cities of Asia Minor successively arose. In the Greek cities of Italy Pythagoras and his disciples promulgated new doctrine and lost themselves in intellectual abstractions. They were the immediate precursors of the later, more flourishing epoch of Grecian philosophy.

How admirable the relics of the search for wisdom which the Greeks made that have come down to us! They in many respects surpass anything of the kind that has ever appeared in more modern times. They are models of philosophic acumen in the investigation of some of the abstrusest facts of our mental and moral constitution. Nothing can exceed their subtilty and eloquence, their ease and grace of diction. The result of their inquiries was something to be proud of. They compacted a body of intellectual science which has been the fruitful germ of all after speculation, and which to this day is the constant admiration and study of the learned. From this source has flowed all philosophy which is worth the name. Culture and civilization, education and political wisdom in all ages of the world has owed much to these old Greeks.

III.

St. Paul could appreciate it all. Had he not done so he would never have spoken these words. But it

was another wisdom with which his mind was chiefly occupied. "Not words of man's wisdom," as he himself tells you, but "the wisdom of God in a mystery," His secret wisdom which had been "hid from ages and from generations, but now had been made manifest to His saints, which God foreordained before the ages to our glory, which none of the rulers of this world knew, for if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

In comparison with the light of Revelation and the contents of Christ's teaching, all that splendid philosophy and wisdom of classic heathendom was mere folly. In the presence of God's eternal truth, as made known by inspired men and by His own eternal Son, it appeared very silly trifling. Viewed from the highest point it was so shallow. It did not even touch some of the profoundest riddles of existence. The special Christian doctrines, sin, guilt, and condemnation, atonement and redemption, resurrection and the state of glory, together with the final restitution of all things and creatures were unknown quantities in their reckoning.

A voice from the hoar past comes to our ears, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent." All their subtle analyses, painful searchings, and laborious reasonings, shall be nothing to my discoveries.

It was the spirit of Christ in one of the prophets which spake these words. Very memorable and infallible is the utterance. In the Christian system it reached its fulfilment.

St. Paul here asks, "Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the truth searcher of this age? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For when in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom

knew not God, it pleased Him by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

"The foolishness of preaching" is the simple and sublime instrumentality ordained by God for the conversion and enlightenment, regeneration and perfecting of men. The salvation of every man depends on the hearing of the word. The Divine wisdom must sound in his ears and come home to him. Its central topic is Christ crucified. Such is the gist and scope of all true pulpit deliverance. "To the called and saved, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God!"

There is vast significance in that sentence. Very characteristic of St. Paul! Others would have taken pages to express the same thing. He condenses it in a few emphatic words. Its meaning is more easily felt than expressed in language. Be sure Christ is in Himself essentially Divine Power and Wisdom, and was so from all eternity. Before the ages He was the indwelling Reason of the Godhead, and in His manifestation in history He is "the Wisdom" and "the Word."

Note the variety and fulness of power that was in Christ. Whatever potency truth has in the world; whatever native force attaches to justice and righteousness; whatever intrinsic and constraining influence goodness has; whatever temperance, prudence, and all the other virtues can effect, they, in the fullest and most perfect efficiency, and in the highest degree, existed in Him, the complete union and harmony of which in His person constituted the sublimest wisdom, which wieldeth all other powers and forces of the universe to fit ends and purposes; wisdom and power all the while standing in

the service of love. "God is love," Christ is love's embodiment, therefore, power and wisdom at their source.

That He who made and has all along governed and will at last judge the world, should in the fulness of time become man, and die as a sacrifice for sin upon the cross, your Surety and Reconciler, is the circumstance that most signally displayed the wisdom and power of God inherent in love.

Note the effects of this doctrine (1) on single persons. What fundamental change of nature! What reformation of character and of outward conduct! How good, useful, and happy! What gladdening prospects! (2) On society. What amelioration of evils! What multiplication of every substantial blessing! What flourishing growth of domestic, social, and civic virtues! What brotherly sympathy, philanthropy, and sacrifice of each for the common weal! What great advance in education and in the arts and sciences, both practical and theoretical! What epochs in literature, in invention and discovery, has not the simple preaching of the cross brought with it in all Christian countries!

There is one circumstance worth keeping in prominence. All Christian missions have succeeded just in proportion as they have heralded the good news of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. There is no fact which appeals more to man's moral nature, none to which the sin-wounded spirit more readily responds, none which so much engages the attention of men, or stirs human nature to its depths, or calls forth the great capacity for good in each, or animates them with the most brilliant and comforting hopes for the future. Nothing so much awakened that divine enthusiasm which carried the apostles and all after missionaries

through their heroic labours. Read the biography of any one of them, ancient or modern. You will find that this is the fact their minds most constantly brooded over, which they cherished with gratitude in their hearts, which they clung to as dearer than life to them, which was the spring in them of the most loving and benevolent, most holy and blessed thoughts and feelings. To this ascribe whatever success attended the first preaching of the gospel, the conversion of the greater part of the Roman Empire within the first four centuries, the rapid spread of the Christian faith in the remoter regions of the world. The apostles of France and Britain, of Germany, Scandinavia, and Sclavonia, through it achieved their conquests over the heathen populations of these countries. Before it the superstition and barbarism, the selfishness and devilry of all other beliefs, quickly gave way. Light sprang up in darkness. Enterprise and joy succeeded a lethargic hopelessness. "The desert became a fruitful field, and the wilderness was made to blossom as the rose."

IV.

But the fact of "Christ crucified" was (1) to the Jews a "stumbling block," and will be so to all who are like minded. You are told in the Gospels what these Jews were like. It is Christ who tells you. "Certain of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, Master, we would see a sign from heaven. He answering, did say to them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and a sign there shall not be given to you, but the sign of the prophet Jonas. For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so

shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment against this generation, and shall condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and behold a greater than Jonas is here. The Queen of the South shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the preaching of Solomon, and behold a greater than Solomon is here ! ”

“ Christ crucified ” was (2) to the Greeks “ foolishness,” because although their minds were familiar enough with the idea of gods on earth in human form, yet all their deities, according to the current traditional beliefs, had met a much happier fate than Jesus Christ. Even Hercules, whose death is usually accounted so tragical, had not experienced anything approaching to the intense anguish and agonies of our dying Saviour. In the case of the one there was no wicked designing, no rankling malice, no cruel conspiracy. A mere accident caused his death. The fatal garment was sent on a love errand. Its deadly nature was not known to his wife who sent it. In the case of the other, all the bad passions of a very wicked people were engaged against Him. It was enormous guilt that nailed Him to the cross. The sun was darkened. The earth shook. All nature shuddered.

But the Greeks saw only the outward human aspect of His story. To their mind their own deities appeared so much more bright, glorious, and fortunate. Their imagination had represented them as of the most graceful forms, most kindly disposed, most propitious guardian gods to them, superior in all respects to the ordinary race of men. But Jesus Christ was conceived

of as a most unhappy and wretched sort of person. He was palpably a man with full share of all ordinary infirmities. He had none of those outward accomplishments which attract and charm the natural man. The preaching and adoration therefore of a malefactor, who had been crucified at the capital of Judea, at the instigation of the priesthood, and with the consent of the whole people, was the most palpable folly and absurdity to their mind. They could hardly at their distance see the huge enormity of the execution. They could scarcely be expected at first to appreciate the divine virtues and merits of the Crucified. But they soon came to do so. In a few years Greece numbered many converts. The Corinthian Church grew apace, and became one of the most flourishing communities in these early centuries.

XXIII.

The Lion and the Lamb.

“Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof. . . . And lo, in the midst of the elders stood a Lamb as it had been slain. . . . He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him that sat on the throne.”

REVELATION v. 5, 6.

OUR attention now is to rest for a short time on the person who in this passage is identified as a Lion and a Lamb, two creatures of the most opposite and diverse natures, and who, to be sure, is no other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

I.

The first thing, therefore, to be remarked is that the apparently most incompatible features and excellences of character are to be found in their full plenitude and intensity in Him, and never in any mere creature, whether angelic or human.

This is a subject that you can easily follow out at your leisure. I shall, therefore, only briefly refer to some of those contrary virtues or characteristics which suggest themselves as most striking, and broadly distinguish the blessed Saviour from all other beings.

For does not the greatest glory and the lowest

humility meet in Him? Here you behold the maximum of majesty combined with the maximum of meekness. The infinity and eternity of the Creator agree together with the finiteness and temporal limitations of the creature. Absolute holiness merges and is lost in absolute love. Unmitigated wrath against sin coalesces with the tenderest and most boundless mercy for poor sinners. Equality with God is seen not to be inconsistent with the obedience due to God; neither is the resignation and weakness of the creature found to be at variance with the sovereignty of the Creator in the same person. Who sees not that these qualities are incompatible in any other being but the Lord Jesus, who is at once both God and man?

II.

Observe, therefore, in the second place, that just as the Lamb-like attributes of His character came into prominence at His first advent, or short period of earthly career and humiliation, so those characteristics of greater majesty and power, suggested by the appellation and figure of a Lion, will have fullest scope and exercise at His second coming, though in either case a sufficient glimpse of the contrary qualities be vouchsafed.

When He first came in the flesh, it was in circumstances of the greatest humility. His birth is a fitting object of your thought at many other times besides Christmas. And, indeed, the whole course of His earthly life, in its full abasement, is so familiar to you that it is not requisite at present to enumerate many particulars. Suffice it to say that from the lowly cradle at Bethlehem, through that period of preparation at Nazareth, to the time when St. John the Baptist heralded Him as the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the

world, there were not wanting incidents that betrayed the supernatural glory of moral excellence that was inherent in Him; whilst during the period of His public ministry the signs of His divinity were more frequent and apparent until the crowning point of His mediatorial labours upon earth was attained, when He was led as a Lamb to the slaughter, and dumb as a sheep before His shearers.

For during His mortal life, in the midst of poverty and abandonment, when He had not where to lay His head; weary, athirst, hungry, envied, persecuted, His life plotted against and compassed—all the time innocent, guileless, patient as a Lamb—did not the mighty power and conquering energy of His Lion-like nature from time to time display itself, more especially in His mastery over physical and moral evils of every sort and death itself? Did He not cure diseases by a word, not merely incidental and exceptional cases, but of every variety and everywhere in the course of His journeys? Did He not quell the turbulence and inordinances of the forces of nature? Did He not cast out devils, and otherwise vindicate His sovereignty over the domain of the Arch enemy? Nay, did He not by death overcome him who has the power of death? Above all, did He not disclose the full glory of His divinity to the three favourite disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, when He conversed with Moses and Elias concerning those very events of redemption which were to be the choice theme of praise as well to the Church of God as to the angelic host to the end of time?

For in that crowning-point of ignominy and of death the depth of His humiliation and the glory of His triumph were coincident. The cross was but the transition to the crown. By His conquest over death He

attained to His mediatorial government. He not merely entered into that glory which He had with the Father before the world was, exercising universal rule and authority, as the Maker and Governor of all things, by inherent right and constitution, but by His merits He purchased a further right and dignity as Mediator in a unique sense, to be Lord over all things to His Church.

Maintaining, therefore, a direct relation to the Church of His redeemed people, joined with them in an intimate community of sympathy and interest, it is not to be thought that the varied humanity of His pure nature, His Lamb-like excellences, have been merged or swallowed up by the divinity, for on such a supposition you should be deprived of the richest comfort your religion brings to you. With what confidence of hope could you look forward to meeting Him at His coming in glory if you were once assured that the basis of a common sympathy and fellowship was gone and lost, and that you had no longer a Brother and High Priest of your profession in the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary? How should you be tempted to betake yourselves to pretended mediators, such as are proposed to you by the Roman Catholic corrupt and erring branch of the one holy Church, in order to fill up the blank caused by its annihilistic theory of Christ's glorified humanity!

But whilst you believe that He will come at the last day in the glory of the Father, and all His holy angels with Him, with rainbow wreath and cloud of storm, as the appointed Judge and Sovereign of mankind, in His mediatorial capacity, you cannot forget those sober words of the two angelic figures who at the Ascension assured the disciples that the Lord Jesus whom they had seen go into heaven should so come in like manner,

that is, in His human personality, which should never perish or be lost by absorption into the divinity or otherwise, till the end of time.

Thus, whilst in His estate of exaltation the blessed Saviour lives mainly in the exercise of almighty power, authority, and government, He still wears your human nature in its entirety, that is, whatever is essential to your normal humanity, and shall survive with you the wreck of time and everything else of a finite and perishable character. For mark, in the passage before you, He is not merely described as a King under the figure of a Lion, a King in His terrors, but however awful His dignity and character as such, still a King of human lineage, sprung from the tribe of Judah and the root of David, just as the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament had foretold, and as the historical registers and genealogies of the New Testament abundantly testify. So that Holy Scripture here and elsewhere takes good care never to let you forget that whilst He is Son of God of pre-eminent and unique majesty, He is still Son of man, even when seated on the throne of glory or on His advent to judgment, when the blue heaven, with its two great luminaries and starry host, and this dædal earth shall pass away like a breath at His presence, and vanish into the nothingness from whence they sprang.

So that our subject is altogether full of the greatest consolation, since it assures you of Almighty power being engaged on your side, the covenant of God ratified with you in Christ from the earliest ages of the Church standing sure, since the promised Messiah, having accomplished His redemptive work on earth, has been constituted with special prerogatives and functions your Mediator and Advocate in the courts above. His ability to help is therefore undoubted. And can you distrust

His willingness, considering what He has already done, and what He has declared that He is doing now for you? For besides presenting His sacrifice and the work of intercession in which He is now engaged, remember what He said to His disciples of the many mansions of His Father's house above, in which He is preparing a place for you in course of time, to come and to take you to Himself, that where He is there you might be also.

In the midst of the throne of glory He was disclosed to the wondering eyes of St. John the Evangelist with the ineffaced and, be sure, the ineffaceable marks of ignominy and suffering for poor sinners. The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, who had prevailed to open the book and to loose the seven seals, is presented to you like unto "a Lamb as it had been slain," to whose praise the four beasts and the four and twenty elders sing a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every tongue and kindred and people and nation."

Behold in the one act of redemption on the cross, that is, in the lowest step of His condescension and self-renunciation, His exaltation to the highest honours and glories of the heavens was secured! "Mercy and truth met together there: righteousness and peace embraced each other." Because "He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross, therefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name," so that He is the appropriate object of the worship of angels and glorified spirits, as well as of the redeemed on earth.

III.

But now, in the third place, it will be necessary to inquire somewhat particularly into the function which He assumes in this passage.

St. John was privileged to see and narrate for your instruction not a few of the contents of that mysterious volume, which the Lamb alone, of all who dwell in heaven or on earth, was considered worthy to take and open. We need not linger at present to consider what significance is sometimes attached to the seven seals, nor the divergent interpretations of the enigmatical figures that are presented in succession, because our business is practical, and ought always mainly to be practical. In addition, therefore, to this book of revelation of the Divine schemes in the historical progression of events, full of interest doubtless, engrossing largely human curiosity and speculation, there is another book which will be opened at the last day by this same Lamb and Lion of Judah, in which each of you has a more direct personal interest, namely, the book of God's remembrance. "When the judgment is set and the books are opened, all men shall be judged by the things that are written in these books."

It is seasonable at all times, not merely in the season of Advent, to direct your minds toward and to fortify your hearts by all virtuous and godly prevision against that great day.

Perhaps the surest proof you can have of your preparedness is the consciousness of your fitness for His reception and indwelling in your heart now. For there is constantly One standing amongst you in these sacred precincts whom there is reason to think some of you know not ; but the spiritual mind discerns His presence

in the ordinances of the word and sacraments, and doubts not of it in the hearts of His regenerate and sanctified ones ; for, unless you be lapsed, that is, fallen from the grace of baptism, "Christ is in you of a truth," as St. Paul says.

Now, without this spirit of regenerate and sanctified character and life there is no hope for you in the day of judgment, since the book of God's remembrance is a record of your inner being, of your thoughts, imaginations, and desires. Your inmost dispositions and truest motives are there registered in indelible characters. There is no evading this scrutiny, because the eye of Omniscience is on you now, just as it will be then, and there is no possible escape from the severe and rigorous glance and reminiscence of your Judge. His eyes are described in Revelation as like unto a flame of fire, so piercing and discriminating that not the slightest movement of our inner selves can escape Him. From your first breath to your last gasp, your whole spiritual life, the succession of your purposes, your wishes, aims, projects, what mean selfishness, base supplanting, what shocking envy and jealousy, what ambition and pride under the garb of piety, what unobserved sins, will not then be discovered and laid bare before angels and an assembled universe !

Some of you, I know, think it very harsh and unkind to have relatively small and venial faults reproved in the presence and hearing of your friends and companions. What, therefore, must be the confusion and horror of those guilty of sins of the greater magnitude, who have hardened their hearts in wickedness and spurned the grace and counsel of Almighty God so lovingly tendered to them, and pressed upon them with motives of constraining power, when the whole enormity

of their inner life is laid bare, and they see themselves in all the loathsomeness and horror of their real condition, and become conscious of the just feelings of demerit and execration with which the countless multitude of their fellow-creatures must necessarily regard them in the full light of eternity !

XXIV.

The Lamb of God.

"Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

ST. JOHN i. 29.

JESUS CHRIST is in Holy Scripture set forth under the contrasted characters of a Lion and a Lamb.

The Lion of the tribe of Judah, in the book of the Revelation, "prevails to open the book and to loose the seven seals thereof."

What does Jacob on his dying bed say of the tribe from which the Messiah was to spring? That "Judah is a Lion's whelp."

The promised Saviour is described as a Lamb in the prophecies. "He was brought as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb."

St. John the Baptist told the crowds that flocked to his preaching that his office, as set forth in the book of the prophet Isaiah, was to prepare the way for Him whom he pointed out to them as at once the pre-existent One and the Lamb of God.

I

The mention of the Lamb of God would at once to the Jewish mind suggest the sacrificial victims of the temple service.

The daily morning and evening burnt-offering at the temple of Jerusalem consisted of a Lamb of the first year with the accompanying meat and drink offering.

With the Paschal Lamb, too, sacrificed amidst the hallowed solemnities of the first yearly festival of the Hebrews, were associated many of their more cherished memories and devotional feelings.

The principle embodied in their sacrifices that "without shedding of blood there is no remission" was deeply engrafted on the mind of the ancient Jewish Church and shadowed forth in its sacred rites.

But it was as palpable a principle that the blood of the Lamb shed at every morning and evening service, or at the Passover festival, or on the great day of Atonement, could not of itself take away sin, but did so only in virtue of its representative and symbolical character, as pointing forward to the blood of the Lamb of God, which should atone for the sins of the whole world by the inherent worthiness and merits of His sacrifice.

When St. John the Baptist heralded "Behold the Lamb of God!" you naturally ask in what respects He is so?

First, then, He was a Lamb in His character, a "Lamb without blemish or spot," as the Pascal Lamb required to be. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners," blameless and irreproachable in the whole course of His life, going about continually doing good. The sinlessness of Jesus is one of the best intrinsic proofs of His Messianic character, and the strongest possible sanction of the religion He founded. Who can estimate in any adequate measure the power of His merits, or the virtue of His example in moulding the character of others and stimulating them to the practice of godliness?

But, secondly, He was a "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," according to the sure foreknowledge and predestination of God. The manner of His death, too, was pre-typified. "The Pascal Lamb was roasted whole, with two spits thrust through it, the one length-wise, the other across through the shoulders," so that the animal was in a manner crucified. He had Himself drawn the people's attention to the figure of the brazen serpent as pointing to the manner of His death. "As Moses raised the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish but have everlasting life."

The lifting up on the cross, however, was only the first step in His elevation to the throne above. For what did St. John the Evangelist in the Revelation see of the bleeding and rent Lamb crucified at Calvary? To be sure, One "that had been slain" surrounded by elders and by an innumerable company of the redeemed, who sang a new song, saying, "Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation."

The prophet Isaiah describes the manner in which the Messiah was to take away the sins of the world, even by bearing their weighty and grievous burden on His own shoulders. "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgression. He was bruised for our iniquities. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned every one to his own way, and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

By the mediatorial labours and atoning sacrifice of

the Son of God, you are thus delivered, (1) from the sense of guilt and the agonies of an accusing conscience. You are emancipated from the fear of death and the condemning sentence of the law, by which all your lifetime you had been kept in bondage. You are (2) freed from the power and dominion of sin in your heart and life. You have presented to you, in the Lamb of God which taketh away sin, a panacea for all human ills, in comparison of which all other remedial measures of themselves have proved wretched failures. How fearfully inadequate all other suggested remedies !

II.

Pass briefly in review the fond schemes of the educationalist, of the politician, of the sanitary reformer, of the advocate of temperance, since each thinks in his own way to regenerate society, and without doubt they succeed in part or piece-work in proportion as they are animated by the true Christian spirit.

1. The educationalist, so far as he is not purely secularist, thinks by rule and method amongst the young to bring up a rising generation exempt from the mistakes and disqualifications of their forefathers. By cultivating the intellectual powers, imparting all necessary and useful knowledge, enlightening the conscience and building up character in the pupils, he designs to bring holiness and happiness into every domestic circle. Who will say that such sweeping reforms as he contemplates may not contribute indefinitely to elevate human life, and increase the efficiency, comfort, and respectability of each singly and of all combinedly ? Individual improvement adds cumulatively to the

progress and prosperity of the nation and to the sum total of human well-being.

2. Others look to the politician for the amelioration of human ills. At the present time tariff reform is regarded by many as the most likely method of fostering all home industries, and providing better markets abroad for our mineral wealth and for the products of our looms and workshops. Prosperity is thought to hang upon a profound knowledge of the laws of trade, and a skilful application of them according to the exigencies of the time and country. A wise handling otherwise of the reins of government is indispensable. You trust to the Legislature for resorting to the best methods of regulating the hours of labour, of arbitrating in the disputes between the capitalist and operative, of restraining crime or repressing it altogether. You look to the same quarter for measures with a view of diminishing pauperism, and of promoting economy throughout the country. Another laudable object is to raise the moral tone and social comforts of the lower classes of the community. In short, all sorts of remedies for existing grievances, real or imagined, are looked for from the politician.

3. The sanitary reformer expects much from his appliances of cleanliness, free air, pure water, and wholesome food of all sorts in the market. Medical science steps in to give him its furtherance and support. A mastery over the forces of nature, so as to turn them to human uses, either in the prevention or cure of the manifold diseases or maladies to which flesh is heir, is the ambitious task which it proposes to itself. The diminution of cholera, fevers, epidemics in our larger towns is so far a proof and promise of higher and better results in the future. The present campaign in this

country against the devastating inroads upon human life of millions upon millions of microscopic living germs, called microbes or bacteria, and the consequent suppression or extirpation altogether of phthisis, pleurisy, or consumption, is being zealously proceeded with. With increasing knowledge of the human constitution, and of its physical organism, and the improved appliances of modern invention and art, in special the recent discoveries of the uses of electricity in medical practice, the miseries of mankind are certainly lessening year by year in a perceptible and wonderful manner.

4. The advocate of temperance, too, thinks that he holds in his hand the key of social and national regeneration.

III.

All these proposed cures are superficial. They do not reach the profound root of the matter.

The passage now before you alone presents a radical and thoroughly adequate remedy, since it goes to the very bottom of all the manifold disorders and perversions of man's life. It first begins at his heart, and effects a cure there. According to the gospel adage, "Make the root good, and the fruit will be good." Sweeten the spring of life, and the outflow of it will not be bitter. The proverb says, "Out of the heart are all the issues of life."

"Behold the Lamb of God!" That look renews the heart, transforms the life, makes new creatures, causes all things in due course to become new.

The gospel is thus the great moral lever for the cure and restoration of diseased humanity. For what does Christ say of His own ministry? He quotes Isaiah the prophet, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because

He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." Such, beloved, is the beneficent character and the blessed results of the preaching of the gospel, if it have free course. St. Paul says that "salvation" in its very widest sense "cometh by the hearing of the word of God," the appropriation and right application of it.

In the history of mankind, in the inauguration and progress of missions, and in each one's personal experience, the Cross of Christ has proved the sole remedy of the moral corruptions and enormities of human life, and by consequence of the physical evils which follow in their train.

Wherever the word of life is preached in all its fullness and freeness, the most marvellous change for good is brought about in the heart and life of peoples as of single persons, minds enlightened, hearts purified, consciences quickened, wills rectified, manners and customs refined, the whole existence transformed, the good of the inner man dilating on everything around.

If you wish savingly to impress and work a change for good in the character and life of any of your careless or vicious neighbours, point them to the Cross of Christ. For what did Christ say? I, if I be lifted up (1) upon the cross, and (2) upon the throne of God, will draw out all men's sympathies, and rivet their intensest affections on Myself, and so accomplish their redemption, the renewal and conversion of their whole being. "Look unto Me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth," is the utterance of the Spirit of Christ in one of the prophets two thousand and six hundred years ago.

Never cease to raise the cry, "Behold the Lamb of God!" in the haunts of indolence and vice. Let it resound on the highways, at the corners of the streets, at the chief places of public concourse. Surely there were never a more pathetic utterance of Divine wisdom.

Oh, beloved, if this cry fail to arrest the thoughtless, startle the impenitent, or shake the self-confidence of the proud; if it bring not tears of contrition to all eyes, and work a thorough regeneration of heart, together with a corresponding reform of outward condition and conduct, there is nothing else either in heaven or earth able to effect it.

XXV.

Contrasted Estimates of Human Greatness.

"Christ saw a certain poor widow casting two mites into the treasury. . . . Some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts."

ST. LUKE xxi. 2, 5.

IN this passage of the Gospel two estimates of human greatness are set before you.

On one occasion when our Lord and His disciples were coming out of the temple, He pronounced a well-merited eulogy upon an indigent widow whom He observed casting two of the very smallest coins then current into the treasury of the temple.

Their admiration, on the other hand, was directed to the massive structure, beautiful and costly marbles, valuable gifts and votive offerings with which the temple was decorated.

We all admire beautiful buildings and other works of skill and genius, and we cannot blame the disciples for remarking the splendour and magnificence of Herod's temple. The emotions they felt at the sight of it were perfectly natural and innocent. It would have been all right and well if they had not been too exclusively engrossed with a grandeur of a merely material character, and unobservant of that moral greatness and dignity

that at once drew our Lord's attention and elicited an expression of His highest approval.

There may be said to be three forms which human greatness assumes: (1) material, (2) intellectual, (3) moral.

The Scripture ideal is mainly of the third character, the other two attaching themselves to it as accidents, for to the holiness and love of the kingdom accrue, by an inevitable necessity, whatever good is to be found in purely material or intellectual greatness.

I.

Public monuments, magnificent temples, sumptuous palaces and cities testify to the spirit and enterprise of a people. They are, indeed, often indicative of the national will and intellect. But in the case before you the disciples admired an edifice which, however grand, was but the work of private and kingly enterprise, constructed at immense outlay to adorn and commemorate the reign of a tyrant and extend his influence, so that their admiration was in reality directed to the genius and ambition of the monarch who designed the undertaking, and whose memory and character was bound up with it.

There was a contrast between Herod's motives of self-glory and ambition in the construction of those stupendous walls and those peristyles of Grecian pillars or porticoes which surrounded the successive courts in front of the temple, on the one hand, and the genuine impulses of piety and benevolence in the bosom of that poor widow on the other, who was parting cheerfully with all her earthly substance for the glory of God. But whereas our Lord penetrated to the heart and

judged accordingly, the disciples' minds rested on the mere outward accidents of earthly greatness.

The tendency of modern civilization is to materialize human life and thought, to attach your happiness and felicity to those appliances and comforts which are the fruits of the ingenuity, invention, and skill which are brought to bear on all branches of industry and human pursuit. This is manifestly wrong. For in proportion as you are made dependent on the mere elegancies and refinements which modern art and science place within the reach and enjoyment of all who conduct their affairs with a reasonable degree of prudence and assiduity, you lose that moral freedom and election whereby you are capable of noble and disinterested, of pious and benevolent deeds which constitute the very grandeur of humanity. You too often become enslaved to self and to the world.

Now, materialism, when it finds an absorbing place in human thought, always invades the province of religion and makes its final conquest there, *i.e.* when it is unable to crush out the very heart and spirit of religion altogether.

In our Lord's day, for example, the Jewish religion was one of external symbolism, of vestments and sacrifices, of charms and genuflexions, of traditions and manifold formal observances, just as there is at this day amongst a large and not uninfluential body of religionists a retrograde movement towards the mere externals of worship or accessory elements. The idea of Catholicity is good, just as the idea of Protestantism is good; but where men pin their faith either to the material accretions of the one, or to the comparatively modern authority and traditions of the other, there is at once perversion and abuse. The word of God and the

spirituality of His worship are in danger of having a subordinate place assigned to them and of being made void in essential points.

II.

We have already made the transition from material to intellectual greatness, since the former is the fruit of the latter and indissolubly bound up with it. This holds good of every sphere of human life, whether that of religion, or that of the mechanical arts, or that of the world of fashion. And just as the world bows itself in lowly homage before its own heroes, the grand projectors of ambition or conquest; or the men of genius, its profound thinkers and philosophers, those ingenious constructors of theories and systems which pretend to explain the mysteries of being, and, forsooth, to free the human mind from those superstitious terrors of the supernatural and spiritual world, which are represented as degrading to the human character and making life wretched, so the same false estimate of merely intellectual greatness has invaded the Church of God, and men have learned to call others masters besides Christ. For, not to speak of the Jewish religionists who made constant appeals to their learned Rabbis; or the votary of Roman Catholicism who regards the Pope and priesthood with superstitious reverence as the depositaries of an infallible tradition, and who in the invocation of saints and angels carries on an extensive system of hero-worship; we who profess the Protestant religion are unhappily not without mere human masters, to whose opinions or theological systems we attach that paramount importance and reverence which is alone due to the revealed word itself. Those systems which are the

substantial fruits of a greatness purely intellectual are in general the outcome of controversy. For in times of religious excitement men of superior talent are called to the forefront and take the lead, giving their whole time, thought, and life to the vindication and elaboration of those principles in the propagation and acceptance of which the success of the party is bound up. And thus, as a result of this intellectualism, we have perpetuated numerous sects and schisms, not to speak of heresies, all acknowledging some master or other, which continue to multiply from age to age, and increasingly cut up into hostile factions of unequal power and contrasted character the Christian camp.

There is thus, you see, a gradation of human greatness. Herod, the builder of that marble edifice, with its roof of gold, was a great man in the eyes of the world.

The Rabbis were great and infallible in the eyes of their countrymen, just as the Pope and the priesthood is in the Roman communion.

Mahomet, the founder of one of the dominant religions of the world, and the propounder of a vast design of conquest and aggrandisement, has, too, become an object of hero worship.

As I have said, there is not a Christian sect which does not acknowledge some master other than Christ, and entertains toward him feelings of undue reverence or regard.

III.

But now let us pass to the highest form of mere human greatness, that which is of a moral character, which, indeed, ought to constitute the firm basis of all other true greatness, whether material or intellectual.

Mahomet the Second was a great conqueror, a

monarch of endless resources and indefatigable resolution and energy. In the year 1543, by the application on a large scale of the late invention of gunpowder, he broke down the walls and stormed Constantinople, which, for upwards of a thousand years, had withstood the siege and assault of Goth and Hun, of Saracen, Mogul, or Turk. But contemporary with him there lived in Harlem, a small town in Holland, an obscure Christian, Laurence Jansen, devoted to the arts of peace, who was wont to amuse himself and children with carving letters on beechen wood, and thus discovered and conferred upon mankind the immense advantages and blessings of printing, which have multiplied and widened from age to age.

Now which was the greater?—the most proficient adept of the military science of his time, who constructed artillery of immense size for battering down the walls of the strongest city in Christendom, or this indigent Dutch printer, whose humble ambition was to fall upon some easy and manageable invention for the benign diffusion of knowledge and of the Gospel or glad tidings of Christ? Truly the moral grandeur of the humblest servant of Jesus Christ, bending his energies to some philanthropic invention, whereby the glory of God and the good of his fellowmen is to be indefinitely promoted, far surpasses the more pompous, intellectual, and material greatness of a Ghingis Khan, a Tamerlain, or a Mahomet.

IV.

And now, in conclusion, consider more fully the gospel ideal of human greatness, which has been characterized as predominantly moral.

The Jewish history presents many examples of

heroism, but we have learned to reckon the value of the exploits, the worth of character solely by the spirit of faith and philanthropy which inspired or prompted them.

Our Lord never once mentions the brothers Maccabees, who were the Wallaces and Bruces, the Leonidas and Tells of the Jewish religionist. He never refers to those system-mongers of traditional doctrine amongst His countrymen but to disparage and to condemn.

Moses and the prophets are frequently upon His lips as patterns of character and instructors of righteousness.

Amongst His contemporaries He reserved His eulogies for such characters as that of Nicodemus, an Israelite without guile, a spectacle of exceeding rarity in those bad and degenerate times. He commended in an unmistakable manner the faith of the good centurion and the piety of the Syrophœnician. He could even appreciate and elicit the smouldering sparks of moral excellence in the degraded publicans. Zacchæus is one of those characters in whom the gospel ideal begins to dawn in full splendour.

Our Lord thus promulgated the law or charter of moral greatness: "He who humbleth himself shall be exalted," "He who esteems himself least of all shall be the greatest." He who cherishes ambition and wishes to be master shall be the servant of all. To impress upon their minds the law of His kingdom He condescended to the lowliest ministry, and enjoined upon them to serve and minister to each other's needs as they had seen Him do to them.

The poor widow casting two *lepta*, a coin of the value of the fourth of a farthing, into the treasury of the temple out of a genuine spirit of faith and piety approximated to the Christian ideal.

It is the inward motive or intention of the heart which, under the gospel, becomes the only proper index and measure of your action or character.

It is the greatness and grandeur of holiness, love, and other graces of the spirit which bears the palm—or ought to bear the palm—amongst you.

Such is the greatness and grandeur of the character of God. He is at once love and righteousness in their full magnitude and intensity.

And what does the prophet say of the Messiah? He speaks of Him as “a root out of a dry ground,” as without comeliness or beauty of outward person. His grandeur and glory consisted purely in the brightness and strength of His love, in which, as in the centre point, met all the rays of righteousness, truth, and other features of moral excellence in their intensest brilliance.

Beholding thus your highest ideal, why should you, like the disciples, one-sidedly admire that greatness which in human works must necessarily, sooner or later, decay and perish, whilst you are too unobservant or oblivious of those qualities or deeds of faith, holiness, and charity which will outlive time itself, and be the comfort and stay of the poor soul to the endless ages of eternity.

XXVI.

The Signs of the Time.

"Can ye not discern the signs of the times?"

ST. MATTHEW xvi. 3.

IT is hard to understand what sort of signs the Pharisees would have liked, probably some supernatural portents in the heavens, as the Lord's pertinent reference to the face of the sky would suggest to you.

At all events they were unable to discern in the beneficence of the Saviour's labours, the wisdom of His doctrine, and the unqualified excellence of His character, true indications of the Messiah; the germs of that kingdom of God, which like a grain of mustard seed was to grow apace into quite large proportions, and afford grateful shelter to all who should betake themselves to it.

It is your privilege and happiness to contemplate the grand and stately proportions which the kingdom of grace, or the Christian Church, assumes in your day, and to trace its gradual progress through the successive centuries from its cradle at Nazareth.

What a changed world since Christ lived! With what marvellous power has the genius of His religion transformed social institutions and moulded human life! In Christendom at least, notwithstanding certain dark

shadows, you may be said to live in a new world. "Old things have passed away. Behold, all things have become new!" This fact, however, is only realized by the regenerate consciousness; the normal and further issues of the transforming influences at work are nowhere else properly understood.

We shall confine ourselves to stating explicitly but briefly some of the signs at present of a brighter and more triumphant era of Christianity, not only in your own country, but throughout the world.

I.

First there is the growing conquest of matter, in which the spirituality of your nature, its likeness to God, pre-eminently asserts itself. This dominion extends increasingly year by year in proportion as a Christian spirit pervades and controls the researches of human science, since the perfect docility and candour which the real reception of your religion ensures is one of the main inlets of truth, and an indispensable condition of discovery. Modern science has become the handmaid of religion, inasmuch as it aids in the Divine task of the amelioration of human ills, as is illustrated in the restriction within ever narrower spheres of fever and other maladies, to the fell ravages of which our population was wont to be much more familiarized.

The immense accumulation of scientific facts in every province of nature makes you masters of inexhaustible resources conducive to the increasing comfort, refinement and happiness of society, so that there is no room left for the gloomy forebodings to which, for example, the probable exhaustion of our coal mines gave rise in some who looked rather despondingly into the future, since it

has been shown convincingly that from the electricity that may be generated from the river and the tide ample light and heat and mechanical power can be produced for all economical, manufacturing, and other industrial purposes. Information on this subject is constantly on the increase. It is not too much to say that you may expect from the manifold amazing resources and uses of electricity ever accumulating proofs and illustrations of the unfathomable power, wisdom, and goodness of God.

II.

Secondly, one of the more promising signs of your age is the closer and more anxious attention that is being paid to the education of the poorer and humbler classes, so that none of the rising generation in your midst is likely to be neglected in that respect, but each, as it were, placed on a fair level and enabled to begin life with that understanding and intelligence which is necessary to ensure success in every branch of industry.

The superior value of intelligent and skilled labour in every occupation is, I apprehend, undoubted, so that reference to the experience of the former slave-holder of the Southern States is unnecessary, his profits being admittedly so much greater from free and paid labour.

One happy result of the principle of the division of labour, which is being carried out in all sorts of industry, is the numberless inventions and appliances that are brought to bear on the production of almost every sort of goods and commodity you can mention, to the great economy of time and power. It is obvious that with the growing intelligence of the workmen you are advancing to an increasingly glorious era of invention,

and that you can look but a short way into the grand vista of improvement and progress which lies before you as a consequence of the enforced and better education of all classes.

Ignorance in the populace is certainly the greatest weakness and blemish of any country or community. There is nothing that so much endangers its welfare, if not its very existence, as witness at this day the miserable and disturbed condition of the Roman Catholic provinces of Ireland. For indolence, discontent, turbulence, go hand in hand with ignorance. Prejudice and bigotry and selfishness hold supreme sway over the popular imagination, so that arguments addressed to self-interest or passion readily inflame and render almost ungovernable a whole people, who have unwittingly disclaimed the authority of reason. How happy and prosperous a country Ireland might have been, if its poorer classes had been equally favoured with the advantages of education and an enlightened Christianity such as the same classes possess in our part of the realm.

But for compulsory education and increasing enlightenment of the working man in England, you should have much to dread from the amazing increase year by year of population, more especially in your manufacturing districts, since in bad times from a labour market overstocked with ignorant and, therefore, idle and dissolute famishing operatives, your community would be subject to manifold disorders, if not convulsions. Revolutionary notions would gain fearful spread, and you should find yourselves in danger of those terrible political upheavals which in the past have been experienced by less happily conditioned nations on the Continent.

III.

A third favourable sign of your time is the revival of Church life.

As one proof of the quickening of spiritual activity, you may be referred to the increase of the Episcopate that has been taking place, and is likely to go on with very advantageous results.

Assiduous parish work on the part of the clergy generally is a marked feature. There has been as it were a new modelling of the machinery of the Church. There has been vast extension in the shape of new parishes and multiplication of places of worship. The value of lay work, too, is being increasingly recognized and turned to good account. The Church Army, with its van and distribution of religious literature, is a significant feature. With the growth of the Episcopate there has been a vast increase of the other two orders of the ministry.

The number of religious periodicals, and the amount of pious and learned work in other ways, which the Church is ever giving forth, is another proof of its intense vitality.

Not one of the least happy results of its intellectual and practical activity is the emulation it gives rise to amongst your Nonconformist brethren, since Nonconformity has ever edified itself by your example, and enriched itself from the stores of your literature.

If the Nonconformist would only candidly consider what he owes to the Church, both of the past and of the present, he should not be the zealous advocate of ecclesiastical revolution as you too often see.

The movement for disestablishment and disendowment is one of those dark and inexplicable shadows that at present obscure your religious atmosphere.

Surely, the Nonconformist by disendowment does not deliberately desire and plan that the higher talent of the country be drained into the more lucrative professions, or into the walks of business.

Whence, then, should you look for those master-pieces of theology, bulwarks of orthodoxy, the confusion of the gainsayer, which are the matured fruits of the learned and pious leisure, which the Church in its higher sphere encourages, given forth on every fresh occasion of attack or danger? You never more stood in need of fully equipped theologians to refute the subtle insinuations of the current atheism, not to speak of the fascinations both of the pantheistic philosophy and positive science. You need champions of orthodoxy now as ever. It is vain to pretend that a ministry fully occupied with the practical details of the pastorate, or one not adequately equipped with the higher intellectual weapons of the age, will be competent for such brilliant and successful polemics as you desire, and without which you cannot feel satisfied.

But notwithstanding certain very marked envy and antagonism from without, together with divergence of ecclesiastical sympathy in the different schools of thought within itself, there are many encouraging signs of a better and a higher Spirit.

IV.

Note, fourthly, therefore briefly, one or two further points.

(1) The attitude of the Church toward the other great divisions of Christendom, its historical connection, its apostolic catholicity and faithful representation of the Christianity of the early centuries, is being better

understood and appreciated by the more highly instructed amongst other bodies of professing Christians in your midst.

(2) The friendliness toward the Church, exhibited in such popular and wide-spread religious movements and organizations of the present day as the Non-sectarian Lay Home Mission is not an unhopeful indication. It is no evanescent or mistaken enthusiasm which recognizes the substantial work and regular faithful services of the Church. The Salvation Army, too, is one of the most striking phenomena of the religious activity of the time.

(3) There is observable a drawing together of Christian hearts from the most opposite denominations. On the platform of Christian life, the pious Roman Catholic and the pious Protestant after all feel that there is not so very great difference between them, since it is the one incarnate Saviour who redeems and claims their allegiance, and the one Holy Spirit who sanctifies and comforts.

(4) The Bible, too, is more increasingly recognized by the most opposite sectaries as the alone standard of faith and duty. The godly papist will be found not to stickle so much for his traditions, whilst the godly puritan also makes a sharp distinction between the matter and the mere form or letter of Scripture.

(5) Brotherly feeling and co-operation is extending to the mission field, so that from the exhibition of increased harmony and love, the heathen may have their attention the more arrested; and the argument, "See how these Christians love one another," prove as effectual as of old in their conversion.

(6) The multiplication of the Holy Scriptures in all languages in almost unlimited quantities, and wide-spread distribution in all quarters of the world, is likely

to contribute more effectually to the joining together all who profess the name of Christ in the unity of the Spirit and in the bond of peace than perhaps any other influence at work. Oh, beloved, amidst all your differences keep in mind that there is one Fatherhood, of which the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

XXVII.

The Light of the World.

"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

ST. JOHN viii. 12.

THE time when these words were spoken was the evening of the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles or ingathering of the fruits.

On the morning of that day Jesus had stood in the temple and cried out, "If any one thirst, let him come unto Me and drink," at the very moment the Jewish priests in their accustomed manner were drawing three logs or Hebrew measures of water in a golden vessel from the fountain of Siloam, which they carried with joyful solemnity, and poured out on the south-west side of the altar.

And on the evening, when the Lord stood in the temple courts and cried, "I am the Light of the world," His words were suggested by the illumination from the lamps of the four golden candlesticks, each fifty cubits high, which stood in the court of the women, as well as from the torches which the priests and Levites carried in joyous procession.

Figure to yourselves, in the midst of all that pomp and ceremony, an apparently poor man from the obscure village of Nazareth, surrounded by a band of illiterate

fishermen, speaking the barbarous dialect of Galilee, and making such remarkable affirmations of Himself.

His words, however, had powerfully impressed the crowd, and caused a schism or irreconcilable difference of opinion. Whilst some of them were surmising that He was truly a prophet, if not the Messiah, others were desirous of laying violent hands on Him but dared not. The very bailiffs or lictors whom the Pharisees sent to arrest Him gave their testimony: "Never man spake like this Man."

Because He had told them the truth, as He Himself said, the Jewish leaders sought to kill Him. They had insinuated all sorts of evil and falsehood to prejudice Him in the eyes of the people. Therefore He retorted sharply, and spoke of the darkness with which the Jews of His day were enveloped; that by not doing the works of Abraham they proved themselves not to be genuine sons of that patriarch, but of another lineage and fatherhood altogether.

Our Lord's conflict with the powers of darkness, then in the ascendant, was now at its height. There was no likelihood of these words, "I am the Light of the world," coming true. But what, beloved, can you say to it now, after the lapse of nearly nineteen hundred years? What is the testimony of history and of experience? Is not Christendom lighted up with a moral and spiritual radiance, in contrast to which all the rest of the world lies, as it were, shrouded in total darkness? If evil and ignorance be crushed anywhere, and the sinner emancipated and enlightened, it is in the Church of the living God. All beyond is still in bondage to sin and error, since the truth in Christ can alone make you free.

But there is the same difficulty at the present day of convincing some people of the truth now before you.

That Christ is the Light of the world appears to many as great a paradox as ever.

Therefore, in order to satisfy a widespread craving after proof and demonstration, some distinguished Church teachers have endeavoured to present the truths of the gospel as much as possible in strictly scientific shape, though it is now generally agreed amongst Christian thinkers, that whilst the higher faculties and intuitions of humanity can appreciate and close with religious truth when revealed, they are quite incapable of discovering it by their own unaided strength, and deducing it from axioms or first principles.

That the peculiarly Christian dogmas cannot be evolved or inferred logically from the elementary truths of pure reason, as the conclusions of mathematics are, need not militate against their reception and belief, because they are mostly addressed to the heart, the conscience, and practical energies, rather than to the intellect.

Note attentively, that the fashionable and polished infidelity of to-day would make a clean sweep equally as well of certain principles of pure reason and of moral intuition as of revealed and supernatural verities, by restricting the scope of ascertainable knowledge to that which you can see, and taste, and handle, and subject to the analysis of the crucible and the dissecting-knife. All inquiry beyond is affirmed to be idle and fruitless. Religion and morality, notwithstanding, are broadly obtrusive facts of human history and experience which demand explanation, and to those of this school who would explain them on their principles or method of co-ordination and equivalence of forces, godliness and impiety, virtue and vice, can be nothing else but secretions of the brain, as necessary as sugar or alcohol or any other secretions of organic matter.

Such is the terrible but inevitable conclusion of the positive philosophy when extended beyond its own province. As dealing with the facts of the outward universe, its investigations and discoveries may be big with benefit to the race. The triumphs of science of late years have been truly marvellous. And taking your stand on the microscopic precision of observation, and the perfection of scientific instruments, and the endless appliances of most nicely adjusted machinery to the practical arts; the conquest of nature by steam; the annihilation of distance by the telegraph, you look forward with the keenest anticipation to the apparently indefinitely greater capabilities of the application of the electricity inherent in the waves of the ocean and in rivers, and indeed in universal nature, for the further promotion of the mechanical arts. But because the Bible does not tell you of the inexhaustible wonders and mysteries of nature around, and does not instruct you in the immensity and revolutions of the universe and the infinitesimal spot your world occupies in it, you are not thereby surely to disbelieve that which it does tell you of facts and truths of the higher side of man's existence, which address themselves directly to your conscience and personality, and which therefore far more deeply concern you.

Science and religion deal with the two diametrically opposite aspects and relations of man's life and being. They are, as it were, in the province of speculation, the two hemispheres of it, co-ordinate and allied, not at variance, since all truth from whatever quarter must agree in one, however diverse in appearance.

In the harvest decorations of your churches at this season you have an unmistakable recognition of the interdependence of science and religion, the one being

the handmaid of the other. Horticultural and farming science have reached a degree of perfection which they could not have attained without the stimulating and fostering influence of pure religion, whereby in the words of prophecy—as it has been the privilege of those of later times to witness—“the wilderness,” in many cases, “has become an Eden, and the desert like the garden of the Lord : joy and gladness are found therein, thanksgiving and the voice of melody.” Without the wisdom and the understanding which the Spirit of God gives to till the ground and to subdue it, to discover and dig iron and other minerals from the bowels of the earth, and apply them to the various economies and uses of human life, the country must to this day have remained very much like a wilderness.

The triumphs of science are undoubted. It lets you see so far into the secret workshop of nature. It probes its mysteries so far, but its crowning mystery and secret it cannot reach. The unfathomable riddle of the world and human life is sin, together with the suffering and death which comes of it. Of that deepest and inextricable secret positive science simply tells you nothing, and from its scope and method cannot tell you. Sin is not a thing that can be subjected to the microscope, or the crucible, or the dissecting knife ; nor suffering either, nor death and the dread eternity beyond. And yet there is no repressing the demands and reasonings of the conscience in such matters. Deprive a man of the true light, he will, with an irrepressible yearning, resort to all sorts of superstitious devices to find a possible satisfaction, as the history of religion has abundantly taught you. Be sure, however, that an expiation for sin such as the gospel presents, and which men everywhere less or more blindly have groped after, is the moral

imperative of humanity, and affords the real solution of the mystery.

It is here that Jesus Christ is clearly manifested as the Light of the world. Not the mere revealer of truth, but the Truth itself; not the giver of light so much as eternal and essential light. Light and truth in His human personality were real and objective, the image of the invisible God, the Father's character unveiled.

The revelation of God's secret, hid from ages and generations, and at last revealed in the incarnation and atoning death of the Eternal Son, has, by way of contrast, discovered to you the nature and extent of the world's secret under all the fair forms of pride, ambition, vanity, worldliness, false trappings of hypocrisy, which the selfishness and corruption of man's heart have thrown around it. The sin which required such an infinite expiation is perceived to be infinitely hateful and of ill dessert, meriting well the wrath of God and endless perdition: whilst the love and mercy which exceeded and conquered your rebellion are magnified and illustrated in the righteousness of the remedy, God being declared to be at once the Just One and the Justifier.

Now, this light of holiness and of grace penetrates to the abyss of man's misery. There is none, however low and despised, which it does not reach. Look what it was in His own day: flashing conviction into the heart of the most neglected and abandoned, quickening, begetting new life, making new creatures; so it is now.

Whatever outward improvements and ameliorations of the social and domestic life modern science may effect, it can never regenerate. It can never impart moral life. It cannot deepen the feeling of responsibility and freedom, or give you the consciousness of sonship. It

cannot replace the moral world upon its real and true axis—love to God and love to man. It is fitly compared to the chaste silvery light of the moon in a clear wintry night, beautiful and good in its way, but pale and cold; whereas the light which shines on you from the Cross is warming and life-giving, like the sun's rays from which nothing can be hid, which causes the birds to sing, and the flowers to blossom, which cheers and gladdens the whole earth, and crowns the year with the Divine goodness, as you are wont to contemplate and rejoice in at this season.

The unhappy tendency amongst men is to hide themselves from the light of the Sun of Righteousness. They will not come to it lest their deeds should be reprovèd; lest the inmost secrets of their hearts be thrown open, and the ghastly abominations of cherished sin laid bare. Accordingly, many close their eyes to the light and hate it, and thrust it from them. But above the gathering gloom, the storm and darkness, the sun shines clear and bright and powerful. And the time will come when the encircling fogs and damps, which hide you from its piercing ken, will be rent and scattered. The secrets of the heart will be disclosed at last, whether you will or not.

Anticipate, then, the scrutinizing eye of the great Judge. Come to God now in humility and contrition. Say to Him with the confidence inspired by the love of Christ: "Search me, O Lord, and know my heart: try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me: and lead me in the way everlasting."

Oh, be sure, notwithstanding all the misgivings and difficult questionings of unbelief, that "if you confess your sin, He is faithful and just to forgive you, and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

SELECTIONS FROM DISTINGUISHED CONTINENTAL PREACHERS.

XXVIII.

The Confession of the Advent Witness, St. John the Baptist.

(SUGGESTED BY THE GERMAN OF MAX FROMMEL.)

ST. JOHN i. 19-29.

TO-DAY, in the last Advent Gospel, the giant form of St. John the Baptist raises his hand, and as a door-keeper of the Christmas festival, points over to the Child in the crib, and calls, "This is He who has been before me," that is, the pre-existent One.

Note the wonderful sublimity and quiet greatness of this Advent herald. St. John the Baptist is the only one besides the Messiah whom the prophets have predicted. Yea, he is the one of whom the Lord Himself said, "There has not arisen a greater among all who have been born of women." But his main greatness consists in the fact that he is an Advent witness of Christ. Therefore he strides along like a herald, with clear trumpet flourish, before his meek and lowly King. Therefore his voice is like the re-echoing call of the lark, which loudly proclaims the approaching spring.

Therefore, his splendour is like the brilliance of the morning star, which exultingly testifies to the rising sun.

St. John the Baptist is dead and gathered to his fathers. But the Advent witnesses will not die until Christ celebrates His coming in glory, to judge the living and the dead. Every one of you who walks by faith is a born witness of Him. The Church, as the community of the faithful, gathered around the Word and sacraments, is collectively His great herald and witness to the world, throughout all the centuries of its existence. That which St. John was before Christ, the ministers of the Church will be to the end of time. John preached not only in order that you receive his testimony, but that yourselves be Advent witnesses.

Consider the Baptist as an Advent witness. He tells you: (1) What he is not; (2) what he is; and (3) what Christ is.

I.

The preaching of St. John the Baptist had resounded far and wide. The man in camel's-hair garment, a head taller than all the people; the man with the pale face and deeply penetrating eye; with the calm consciousness of God's presence; proclaiming with quivering lip repentance and the Kingdom of Heaven at hand, had called forth a wide and deep religious movement. The lonely desert had become alive with the multitudes who drank in his deeply touching words. The waves of the movement in due course beat at the doors of the High Council at Jerusalem, which felt constrained, whether for good or evil, to busy itself with the matter. The governors of the Jewish Church assumed an official attitude to the work of the Baptist. It was their duty,

since the care and responsibility for pure teaching in the land had been entrusted to them. They resolved to investigate, sending a commission of Priests and Levites with the question, "Who art thou?" If he should say he was the Messiah or Christ, the accusation of blasphemy might be pertinent. If he should say No, why, then, did he presume to baptize and introduce new doctrines and ceremonies? St. John, who saw through their craftiness, answered briefly, "I am not the Christ." They a second time put the question, "Who art thou?" but he answered them quite as curtly, "I am not Elias; I am not the prophet whom you look for."

The Baptist thus told them plainly what he was not, for he himself looked for the Messiah the most longingly of all the men living in Israel. He felt himself utterly in need of Him. Not a great man of history in his own eyes! Not a significant figure for the future! Oh no! John knew and confessed of himself that he was of small account in comparison with Christ.

Such, beloved, is the humble confession of him of whom Christ said, "He is the greatest of all men who have been born of women." Oh, learn, from this greatest man, so very small in his own eyes, that to be small is the way to true greatness. Get fundamentally loose from the illusion of your own significance, from the blinding influence of natural pride, from the over-weening excesses of self-regard.

When the people heard the call to repentance, beholding their faces in the clear mirror of the Divine law, and perceiving how sin had blurred and deformed it in themselves, they came down from their high stilts, bowed low in the dust, and in their turn bore testimony. In true repentance is rooted the lowly self-consciousness of

the Advent witnesses of Christ. Only so do they attain their high calling to be like stars in the firmament, who, in themselves opaque and dark, are shone upon by their sun Jesus, and are privileged to reflect His beams.

II.

St. John the Baptist has told you what he is not. He is not the Christ, neither Elias, nor the prophet of the future. When they asked him, "Who, then, art thou?" he answered frankly what by God's grace he is. "I am a voice." Not more nor less than a voice! A voice instinct with the Spirit of Christ, proclaiming His person and office. Such the self-consciousness of the Baptist; such the task of his life, in which was comprised his whole Divine mission, which, as Advent witness, he was to fulfil in due course. A voice which loudly heralded Christ, and summoned all men to Him from far and near. What the prophet Isaiah eight hundred years before predicted, the Evangelist describes as accomplished in the words, "There was a man sent forth by God, whose name was John, who came to bear witness to the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness to it."

Beloved, each of you is called to be an Advent witness of Christ. It is your noblest task of life, to testify by word and conduct to Him who redeemed you from your vain conversation in the world. Higher you cannot attain than to be a voice, which sings of Christ the new song, the mouth overflowing with that of which the heart is full.

"To be sure," St. Paul says, "there are many voices in the world," but amongst the voices of joy and

sorrow, amidst the screaming turmoil of wild lust, and the song-dance around the golden calf; amidst the lamentations of woe, and the wails of dying humanity; amidst all the other voices of the sighing creation, there ever again rises, now more gently, now more loudly, now as a solo, now as a chorus, the voices of the witnesses of Christ, who sing of the Lamb of God, which beareth the sin of the world, and of the Lion of God which has overcome; the song of the pilgrims who, in a strange land, sing of the home above, who, amidst the desert sing of paradise, amidst graves sing of eternal life. The confession of the Church may not grow dumb, which amongst all the voices of the world ever again makes itself heard. You believe, therefore, you are bound to speak. Because you have received of the fullness of the Spirit you sing, confess, testify, and feel that it is the noblest content of your life to be a voice for Christ in the world.

"I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness," St. John the Baptist says. Not in a blooming garden does he preach. Israel, together with the rest of sinning humanity, had become a waste desert. Not on the noisy streets had he his open-air pulpit, but in loneliness, solitude, and stillness. Not in the temple at Jerusalem, acknowledged by the dons and notabilities, but in the free air of Jordan—there was his church and his baptismal font. Through his testimony to Christ, the waste desert of hearts straightway became a garden of the heavenly kingdom. The desolate place loudly re-echoed with the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride, and from the waste there arose a temple for the adoration of God in spirit and in truth.

The gist of the Baptist's preaching is, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord. Make an even path for your God."

All valleys shall be embanked, and all mountains and hills shall be levelled. What is uneven shall be made straight, and the rough places smooth.

One thing, therefore, God should do by St. John's preaching, to wit, prepare the way. A hard, difficult work, of weighty import! To cast down mountains and to fill up valleys, that the royal coach of the Messiah might have a straight and smooth road! You have a very clear figure of it in the construction of a railroad. Behold, now the embankment rises in the valley, and again deep cuttings are made in the higher grounds. Where the mountain is too high a tunnel is driven through it. Here rocks are blown up, there bridges are built over rivers, to avoid the crooked ways and to make smooth the rough places. Such is a parable of the highway construction in the kingdom of God, that is, of the work of the ministry of St. John the Baptist, and of the other Advent witnesses. The mountain of the defiant heart must be humbled; the valley of the desponding spirit must be raised up; crooked ways of life must be straightened by the imitation of Christ. Following Him direct, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, you will meet with no roughnesses, no overhanging dangers, no stumbling-blocks, no ups and downs in your spiritual progress. All obstructions, however deeply congruous to your nature, shall be done away. To prepare the way of the Lord, therefore, is the business of the Church. Every member of it, whatever may be his condition and calling in life, is summoned to this service, the ministers or stewards of God's mysteries being the overseers.

III.

Listen, briefly, in the third place, to the Baptist's preaching of Christ, to the proper Advent declaration of what He is to you. St. John clearly confesses that He who came after him by birth was before him in time. Jesus both before and after him! What a strange paradox, yet true! How great Christ stands before your soul, as He who was, and who is, and who is to come, the Alpha and the Omega, so great that the greatest of all mortals bows before Him in the dust, so transcendent that His precursor did not deem himself worthy to loose the thongs of His sandals.

Beloved, if you, too, would be Advent witnesses, Christ must stand clearly and sublimely before your souls, as the Eternal Son of God, who existed before all generations and ages, as the Messiah Redeemer, the Saviour of sinners, who, being from all eternity, appeared in the fulness of time as the King of humanity in servant form, but who will come at the end of days as the King of kings, upon the throne of His glory. His figure, so meek and humble, yet withal so lofty and serene, that your souls bow in the dust before Him! At His feet you kneel and worship, and with all the saints stammer the confession, "Not worthy!"

The Christianity of reason does not suffer the Lord Jesus to be greater than your understanding can comprehend. The Christianity of sentiment does not make Him other than what blind feeling is able to forebode. But true Christianity accepts Him in all the grandeur and glory of His person, as the revealed word describes and manifests Him. The Christ of the Bible is a heaven higher than the poor Christ of the understanding, or the Christ of mere sentiment and feeling, since

He is before you and after you, and over you; before you, prior to and greater than all worlds, yea, than Cherubim, Seraphim and the angelic hosts. To magnify and glorify Him is the office of the Spirit, the task of the Church, the blessed joy of the Advent witnesses, the highest happiness of life. Your place is at the feet of Jesus; be it in worship, to loose the thongs of His sandals when He stays and rests with you; be it to prepare the way for His holy feet, when He wills like a hero to stride along.

The Baptist, however, knew more of Christ than His serenity and grandeur, than His infinity and eternity. He testifies of Him, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" It is the most beautiful word from His herald's mouth, perhaps the most beautiful that has ever escaped the lips of men. It is the word which rings through the whole Bible, from the sacrificial lamb of Abel, and the atonement offering of the lamb in the temple on the greatest day of reconciliation in Israel. The idea of expiatory sacrifice pervades Old and New Testaments alike up to the Revelation of the Evangelist St. John, where, by the crystal sea, the song of the Lamb resounds. The thought rings through the whole Church in its Passion hymns and prayers. It is the text of all preaching of the Cross. In how many thousand souls has the word of the Baptist prepared the way for Christ, who, as Advent witness, now calls upon you to open your eyes and behold your sins borne upon the holy back of the Lamb of God.

Oh! beloved; with this vision look into the crib at Bethlehem; with these eyes gaze on the Cross at Golgotha; with this faith contemplate the throne above, upon which the Lamb sits, and with the Church of all

time pray, "Lord, Thou Lamb of God, Who takest away the sin of the world, vouchsafe to us Thy peace."

Of this Lamb sing and testify; with Him is forgiveness of sin, not for your sins alone, but for those of the whole world. Hither call and invite all the weary and heavy-laden, all broken hearts and souls athirst for salvation. "The blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanseth from all sin." The preparation of His way, the Advent testimony has the one aim, that you come to Jesus the Lamb of God and He to you; that you have in Him redemption through His blood. Then first He becomes properly glorious when He stands before your soul, not only in His Messianic kingly majesty, but in His suffering Saviour beauty, both as the Lion of God and the Lamb slain for you.

St. John the Baptist is dead. The actuality of this great man, measured by human standard, appears small. Thirty years in concealment in the desert, a short high-tide movement of the people by his preaching, a lonely languishing in a dungeon, and a short Amen to his life's work by a martyr's death concludes his story. But his word lives until to-day in the Holy Scriptures and in the Church. Year after year the form of the desert preacher passes before Christendom. The Evangelist lays down the most beautiful testimony to his actuality when he tells you that many who resorted to Jesus beyond Jordan at Bethabara said, "John did no miracle, but all which he spake of this Man (the Saviour Christ) is true."

XXIX.

Forget not the Best Thing.

(SUGGESTED BY THE GERMAN
OF D. FRIEDRICH AHLFELD.)

"But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

TITUS iii. 4-7.

I.

BELOVED, we all delight in sensible figures, parables, myths. We gladly clothe in a fable or legend a great thought in order the better to grip it fast. In such a dress it is the more easily handed down, and retains its freshness.

Thus it is fabled of hidden treasures, mysteriously locked up, to which no wit or force of man can penetrate. You cannot dig deep enough into the mountain, nor burst open the rock which contains the treasure. But in the seclusion and darkness of the forest there blooms here and there a little blue flower. He who finds it can, with a touch, open the rock and appropriate as much treasure as he desires.

The searcher hears a voice from the depth, "Forget not the best thing," which might suggest to his mind a huge nugget of gold or very precious stone. But it does not. It is the flower which he should not forget. If he leaves it behind, the mountain and the rock will close, and he can never again enter.

You know the mountain in which the most excellent treasure lies hid. You often pray, "I lift up my eyes to the hill from whence cometh my help." You know the rock which contains the hidden treasure, from which springs the living water. You know also the little blue flower, to wit, faith and trustful hope.

The hallowed Christmas season is one of the days of grace, on which you enter into this mountain. Yes, the mountain has been entered. How great treasures have been found in it! With what gifts have you been blessed and refreshed! Many have felt happy in a beautiful family life. Children have rejoiced in the love and kindness of parents. Parents have been gladdened at the pains children have taken to make joy for them. Friends have given and received mutual tokens of regard. The gifts of mercy from the opulent have been richly showered down upon the poor.

Beloved, you are parting with the Christmas season. You are stepping forth from the mount. One of you takes with him this blessing, the other that, into the further days of life. Hark, from the holy mount, from the cot at Bethlehem, a voice calls, "Forget not the best thing."

What is the best thing? What flower is in question here? The lily of Sharon, with its pure white blossoms; the rod from the stock of Jesse, which shoots forth from a dry ground; the Child conceived by the Virgin, born without spot or stain, living sinless until death.

The best thing is faith in the graciousness of God the Father, who has so lovingly regarded our ruined race that He planted on our poor earth this pure and holy flower—this world medicine with the savour of life unto life.

Yes, beloved, forget not the best thing: faith and its object.

The grace of God in the birth of His Son, the most precious gift and treasure.

II.

There are many spots on earth which a grateful posterity has adorned with monuments. In one place a tablet is set in a wall. In another a memorial stone is raised. In a third a statue. Each speaks of some signal achievement which a good man has done. Here such a benefactor has been born; there is the scene of his labours; and somewhere else is his burial-place. At such a spot one has sacrificed himself for his fatherland and friends; at another one has been a martyr to truth. To such places men's thoughts go forth from afar. But the greatest of them all is the little City of Bethlehem, in the land of Judah. There the heavens opened; there God sent down His Son; there peace was concluded between heaven and earth; there Divine grace shone forth in its most beautiful splendour; there is the brightest spot in the whole world's history, the sunniest place of the whole earth.

And yet it will appear the brighter by contrast when you consider the time. St. Paul pictures to you the foregoing age, and the condition of man in it. "Ye were heretofore ignorant, disobedient, erring, serving divers lusts and pleasures, walking in malice and envy,

hated and hating one another." In the midst of this night the light appeared. Amidst variance and dismemberment God gave the Child of Peace, who should draw together and unite all in true Divine fellowship, "turning the hearts of the fathers to the children, and those of the children to the fathers."

To Bethlehem and the birthday of the Lord the prophets pointed from afar; the angels from heaven beckoned; and the peoples from all the ends of the earth were turned. For every one who will be saved the finger-post of history points thither.

And what do you see there? The manifestation of the graciousness and philanthropy of God your Saviour. It was no longer a prophecy, a mere discourse. The mildness and condescension of God stepped essentially and personally into your midst.

People often dissemble with their kindness. Much of human converse is like a painted mask, a tone of speech learned by rote. But here is essential truth, the heart of God unveiled, the highest matter of fact of His graciousness.

Indeed, His graciousness has other and diverse manifestations. It appears when the sun rises, when the earth covers itself with a green mantle, when the trees are decked with blossoms, when the fields wave with golden grain.

It appears in danger, when God extends His protecting hand over you, smooths the way, and delivers when you, perhaps, had despaired of all other hope of deliverance. It appears when He heals and restores what you had marred. It often arises so bright that you cannot look into it, and for joy the tears run down your face.

But here it rises above all sunrise, above all spring-time, above all blossoming and harvesting, above all

other deliverances. God gave to you His only-begotten Son. Behold the Divine mildness and condescension made manifest. The likeness and image of the uncreated glory and love revealed in real human personality.

Beloved, what is the most generous and magnanimous thing which a king can do to mutinous and rebellious subjects? Surely, to appeal to their honour, and show no distrust, to send amongst them his own son, to reveal to them his heart, how much good he purposes toward them, to illustrate in his son's person and acts the blessedness of loyalty and obedience.

All such figures come short of aptly delineating the eternal love. Behold in infinite condescension God revealed to you as a helpless infant! Of a human mother the Eternal Son is born. Around this Child the old prophetic utterances entwine themselves, predictions of a new golden age, of the restored paradise, of peace on earth, when righteousness should be like the waters which cover the sea, when no one should hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain, when the wolf should pasture with the lamb, the leopard lie down with the kid, and the lion eat straw like the ox. Around this Child there rings the hymn of the angels, "Great joy shall befall all peoples. Peace on earth!"

Kindly appears the sunlight which, after long gloomy winter, falls into the room of the sick. But here the kindness is unspeakably greater. Here arises the Sun of Righteousness, with salvation in His beams.

III.

Why did God do His greatest act? Why did He give His beloved Son in the form of flesh and blood?

St. Paul says, "according to His mercy He saved you." Not for works of righteousness which you have done.

Yes, beloved, if you had remained in Eden, in a condition of innocence and integrity, the Son might have come down to earth out of complacency to your good deeds. If your heart, in its thinking, loving, and willing, were a reflex of the heart of God, if your life were a continual walk in fellowship with Him, you might, on the ground of merit, have been judged meet associates worthy of His visit.

But what sort of a race was yours? One deeply fallen and sinful. The bond between God and you was broken, dismembered was His great human family which yet was one, sprung from one Father. Instead of God, men worshipped and served the creature. Instead of thank-offerings from pure hearts there ascended to heaven the cry and horror of their sin and guilt. Their life was a ceaseless dishonour and offence to the Most High. The more favoured and enlightened thought of Him, either not at all, or with terror and hatred. They would gladly have blotted out His name from the earth. As a natural result of ungodliness, they lived in envy and hatred, in wrath and bitterness, in a chronic state of selfishness and war the one against the other.

To so abandoned a race God sent His beloved Son—not to condemn the world, but to save it. He, from Whom men deserved wrath and death, vouchsafed to them love and light and life in personal form.

Take an illustration: Two ships are sailing upon the sea, the one large, the other small. The larger one is loaded with a precious cargo, and is managed by a wise and godly pilot. It is voyaging to a secure haven, and will bring its passengers to a good and happy land. The other is manned by a reprobate crew, who are watching

for a favourable opportunity of boarding, plundering, and setting fire to the neighbouring vessel, and drowning its occupants. They will make the attempt from mere devilry, if they have but the slightest chance of success. It happened one day that the pirate ship by the carelessness of its crew caught fire. Whilst it burned, a storm completely burst asunder its joints and fastenings, and scattered its wreckage and living freight upon the waves. Now, what would you say of the captain of the larger ship if he hove to, lowered his boats, and, at the risk of the lives of his own crew, saved the lives of the drowning men, and as much of their property as he could? Why, all the world would applaud his mercy and humanity.

This parable is illustrated in the highest measure by the gracious act of God your Saviour, celebrated at this season. All sinners are the enemies of God; they would destroy His kingdom, abolish His institutes of salvation, and sink His ship the Church. They would blot out His name from the heart and conscience of the people. They would trust to their own frail bark of man's device for deliverance. But, behold, it quickly suffers shipwreck, and its occupants swim along at the mercy of the billows in a raging, bottomless sea. Now what does God do? The ship of salvation is straightway on the spot, with more than human pilotage. There is more than an ordinary boat put forth. The Eternal Son is there in the tempest and roar of the wild surge, for so the sinful exorbitances of peoples are in Scripture frequently set forth. He dies in the heroic work of rescuing His enemies from the abyss. In self-sacrifice and death He most mightily stretches out His arms to the lost.

IV.

This pure and undeserved mercy will appear in fuller magnitude when you contemplate the blessed hope depending on it.

From heaven grace comes down; to heaven it leads up. As grace began with the Christ Child, and was first planted in Him, so it begins also in your children.

Behold free grace demonstrated! The children had done no work, could do none. Their early weeping is a cry for grace. Free grace takes them lovingly in its arms. Their Christmas gift is Christ Himself.

From the cradle at Bethlehem the way leads to the baptismal font. From the Son of God, born in the flesh, goes forth the sacramental virtue for the regeneration of your children. Because in that cradle the Child of God rested, children of God repose in your cradles.

St. Paul here tells us, "God saves you by the bath or washing of regeneration." Regeneration is only through the Holy Child, who brings down that pure new life from heaven to earth. But to the new birth there necessarily belongs the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He pours on you abundantly through the same channel. The Divine Child brings the heavenly Spirit with Him.

In Jesus Christ is comprised righteousness, sonship, peace, heaven. Such spiritual goods and endowments the Holy Ghost in baptism places in right and title, on the pillow of the infant, even when asleep. They are bequeathed to him. They are his.

By-and-by the child, under the instruction, admonition, and guidance of its mother or pastor, learns to stretch out its little hand toward these goods. When in the little heart faith becomes living, the Spirit takes these goods

from the baptismal pillow, and places them in the heart.

Saved by the Lord and His strength, how happy are the little ones! How they look up from the Christmas tree, crowned with the lamb holding the banner of victory to the Lamb near the Heavenly Father's throne!

From the Christmas season be sure to carry with you the treasure of grace through all the days of your mortal life. Never forget the best thing.

XXX.

The Holy Task of Missions.

(SUGGESTED BY THE GERMAN OF MAX FROMMEL.)

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates! and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors! and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle."

PSALM xxiv. 7, 8.

THE Epiphany is the manifestation of the glory of Christ.

The Gospel for that day has for its subject the adoration of the babe by the wise men from the East.

Whilst at Jerusalem no one knew of the new-born King, whilst at Bethlehem there was not a room for His reception, the Son of God lying in the crib of the stall, an unusual star beckoned the strangers from afar, to be prophets and evangelists of the Messiah. They knelt adoringly, and paid Him tribute of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

We English cherish a predilection for this festival. With thoughtful minds our forefathers contemplated the event it celebrates. They sang their Epiphany hymns, and in numerous pictures represented the contrast of the poverty of the crib with the oriental pomp of the pilgrims.

The greeting of the infant babe by the three Eastern kings suggests the covenant between State and Church,

as well as between outward lowliness and inward grace and glory, in which the deep sense of our people finds expression.

Epiphany is our mission festival, the three worshippers the first-fruits of the host of peoples who afterwards would seek and find their way to the Saviour.

The portion of Scripture appointed for the Epistle of Epiphany begins, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come," and it concludes, "Lift up thine eyes and look around. All these, from afar, sons and daughters, are gathered unto Thee."

That prophecy, after the lapse of seven hundred years, found in the adoration of the Magi its first fulfilment. The gospel in turn becomes a prophecy, and the history of the Church and of missions declares its continuous fulfilment throughout the successive centuries.

People upon people, land upon land, millions upon millions, have come with devotion to the New Testament Zion. The grain of mustard has grown into a huge tree, amidst whose boughs the hymns of all peoples and tongues resound, from whose shelter thousands go forth into the highways and lanes of the heathen world, and cry untiringly, "Come, for all things are now ready."

So celebrate Epiphany, and understand the passage before you. "Who is the King of glory? The Lord, the same yesterday and to-day and for ever!" The Lord strong and mighty! The Lord mighty in battle! in battle between flesh and spirit, in battle between the world and Church, between heaven and hell! He abides Victor, Prince of Peace and King of Glory. For Him the missionaries lift high the portcullis, and open wide the gates into the heathen world.

Consider the holy work of missions.

How it is (1) Christ's work : and (2) Your work.

I.

In India, when the anniversary of the great idol Juggernaut is celebrated, the gates of the idol temple are thrown open, and a huge waggon appears; upon it a high throne, on which the image is set, painted red and black, adorned with gold and feathers. The idolatrous priests in white vestments surround the waggon, to which thousands of men instead of horses yoke themselves, and drag it to the waters of the Ganges. Whilst on its way, men cast themselves beneath its wheels, to meet death with its crushing weight.

A horrible picture of heathenism! Its gods wood and stone, clay and spangle! Such its festival at the opening of the idol temple! Such the life of the heathen, to be yoked to the idol waggon! Such their death, to be pounded by its wheels!

Do you know the idol waggon? Ah, it goes through the lands of Christendom under another name. With you the idol is the lust of the world in its three forms, "the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life." This idol has its temple, its priests and priestesses. Amidst loud jubilee, thousands harness themselves to its chariot, and draw the yoke. Under its heavy burden the heart is gnawed, and gains no peace from its insatiable desires. Hundreds of thousands die before its crushing wheels, for sin is the ruin of peoples.

Hallelujah! There goes another chariot through the world, and upon it sits One. You see Him in the Apocalypse. His face shines like the sun, and His

raiment is white as snow. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and His voice as the great roar of ocean."

The Lord Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, makes progress in His chariot throughout the world, invisible, surrounded by hosts of angels, but visibly drawn by thousands upon thousands of His disciples, preceded by His heralds and witnesses, followed by hosts of saved souls. Whilst they draw and push forward the chariot of victory, the thousand-voiced jubilee bursts forth, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who cometh in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the Highest!" The heralds with trumpet-blast stride on in front and cry, "Open wide the gates, and lift high the portcullis of the world that the King of Glory enter."

Do you not know the waggon and Him who sits upon it? Do you not see Him in the Gospels, how He raises up His gracious hand in blessing? How, as He passes by, He stretches out His arms of love to all who are weary and heavy laden! How He goes along now upon earth in the chariot of His Word and sacraments! How He sorrows over your misery, because your souls are perishing without Him! Sin makes you wretched because it separates you from God, from light and life, and casts you into night and death.

Look into the heathen world. There you see what man is without Christ. There you have the collective picture and the collective history of the natural man. Dark is his life when he kneels before the idol, and says to the wooden block or silver image, "Thou art my God;" or when he calls upon the powers of nature, "Baal, hear us! Baal, hear us!" and there is no voice in answer; or when, like the Athenians, he builds an altar with the inscription, "To the unknown God."

Behold the cry of distress from the deep, the roar of

storm in the dark night, the wail of despair and the sigh of sorrow from languishing humanity, as it stretches out its thousand arms to heaven, and weeps over its lost paradise!

Dark, too, is the death of the natural man, when the king of terrors knocks at the door, and you pass into the realm of shades, without light, without hope, peaceless, joyless, without God, down into the eternal night.

In this night of heathenism Christ comes to seek and to save that which is lost. He brings life and light, the forgiveness of sin and salvation. As it is the deepest misery, whether outside in the heathen world, or inside Christendom itself, to have lost God, so it is the highest delight to find Him. If the Scriptures rightly say, "The godless have no peace," are you livingly sure and conscious that those blessed of the Lord have it, deep, true, eternal?

Christ is the way of this peace. All other boasted panaceas of science, education, or progress in culture, cannot heal the deep wound of sin and guilt. The wall of partition between God and man must be broken down. Otherwise you remain in the deepest ground of your being miserable for time and eternity.

Let me cite a remarkable witness of this truth, all the more striking because he occupies an equivocal position in regard to Christian faith, an original searcher into nature, the founder of that school which, on the theory of the natural development of species, traces man's origin proximately to the ape, thus ignoring the special creative act of God, Charles Darwin, who made a memorable voyage of scientific discovery round the world. When he came home, he gave an account of his experiences. In plain, unadorned language, he says, "The only points of light and hope in the broad heathen

world are the settlements of the Christian missions. If any one voyage to distant lands, and his ship run aground upon an island, he will fall upon his knees and thank God that the missionaries of the Cross have trod the land before him." He concludes with the significant words, "By all means carry to the heathen the preaching of the gospel. They cannot otherwise be holpen." Beloved, what else is that than, in the mouth of one sceptically inclined, the re-echo and confirmation of the word of St. Peter, "There is salvation in no other."

Survey once more the heathen world. Wherever the gospel of Christ is preached, there is at work a power of God to make those blessed who believe in it. There is a rustling amongst the dead bones, and upon the plain all becomes living. Under India's glowing sun congregations have sprung up, who now dwell under the shadow of the palms of peace. In the far north, on the coast of Greenland, Christian communities have bloomed, like lovely gardens in the midst of ice-fields. Amongst the negroes of Africa, and on the distant islands of the South Sea, the breath of the Spirit has rustled and awakened life from death. Note the fulfilment of the prophecy. "The heathen shall come to Thy light." "Awhile they were darkness; now they are light in the Lord."

Therefore, lift up your eyes and regard the missions in a divine light. Recognize in them the work of Christ. Everything depends on the way of looking, whether from above or from below. If you consider them from below, you see only a fine fragmentary work, an enterprize of a few well-meaning and godly men. Few days and slow results scarcely appear to compensate the enormous sacrifice. But if you consider it from above, from the position of Christ who has given the command and

promise, the heathen mission is really the greatest undertaking the world has ever seen, the connected labour of centuries on which the noblest minds have set their heart and the greatest characters have willingly given up their lives. Behold, the way of the Cross goes through all times and lands with the old crusade watchword, "God wills it! God wills it!"

The whole work of Jesus Christ, His life, sufferings, death, resurrection, and session on the throne above, issues in the mission to all the world, which progresses throughout the centuries and outlasts all merely human works. Whilst the great world kingdoms, the one after the other, sink in ruins, the kingdom of grace extends, and will endure until the end of time. "Say amongst the heathen, The Lord is King. He has prepared His throne, and will judge the nations righteously."

II.

However certain it is that missions are the work of God, it is also certain that in another sense they are yours.

Christ commissions His disciples to "go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." He places the commission in your hands, and by the impulse of His Spirit you have to perform it, if not directly, indirectly by proxy. By prayer and offerings you provide messengers to go in your stead.

To His Church and all its faithful members the call is addressed, "Open wide the gates, and lift high the portcullis of the world that the King of Glory enter."

Behold your mission task, to draw out the chariot of your Lord Jesus Christ into the heathen world, to prepare His way and to make straight His paths.

Whoever amongst you recognizes that in Christ

there is forgiveness of sin, life and salvation, will yoke himself to this chariot, and help to carry forth life and light to those who still sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

One thing you know, that you were blind, but now you see. You see in spirit Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ready to succour, interceding, raising His hands for this great work, which is at once His and yours.

But your hand, be it the hand of prayer directed upward, or the hand of alms stretched out to the heathen, will be governed by the heart, which must receive a holy impulse. Otherwise the lips remain dumb and the hands lame.

How does it happen? Note the deep import of this question. Let its answer lie upon your heart, like a live coal from off the altar, if perchance it may kindle you to warmer and more self-sacrificing love.

Whence, then, the impulse for missions? To the pulling the gospel chariot into dark, heathen lands a strong team must undoubtedly be yoked. Where lies their inspiration and power?

The answer is briefly comprised in a melody which the Holy Ghost teaches. When you learn it, you will be singers in the choir of the city of God, and will gain the needful strength.

All songs of praise in both the Old and New Testaments re-echo it. It is the melody of free grace, "Not worthy!"

The patriarch Jacob sang it when, after long exile, he returned home, surrounded by numerous tokens of God's blessing. "Lord, I am too small, too unworthy, for all the mercy and faithfulness Thou hast showed to Thy servant."

On the threshold of the new economy stands St.

John the Baptist. He bowed himself before Him who should come, and confessed, "I am not worthy to loose the thongs of His sandals."

The lost son too sang, "I am not worthy to be called thy child."

And so the good centurion of Capernaum, "I am not worthy that Thou shouldest go under my roof, but speak the word only."

So St. Paul, the great apostle, says, "I am not worthy to be called an apostle."

Beloved, such a confession makes the heart joyous, the utterance eloquent, and the hand willing for sacrifice. If any one say that free grace makes true religion frustrate, the lives of these singers witness to the contrary. Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed. St. John the Baptist laid down his head and life in confession to the truth of God. The good centurion with his own money, out of a grateful heart, built a synagogue for God's people. St. Paul tells you that he worked more than any of the other apostles, yet not he, but the grace of God in him.

Such is the source of power, the locomotive force for the drawing of the chariot, free grace penetrating the whole energies of man, quickening and impelling; the melody abiding in the heart, "Not worthy! not worthy!"

Christ's work and merits become yours. You cannot but testify of that which you experience, the facts of the Christian consciousness. Then the call finds its re-echo, "Throw wide the gates, and lift high the portcullis of the world that the King of Glory enter. Who is the King of Glory?" The Lord Jesus Christ, born King of the Jews, anon King of the heathen, the King of the whole world, your King and your God. "He is the King of Glory." Hallelujah! Amen.

XXXI.

An Old Man's Home Dearing.

(FROM THE GERMAN OF FRIEDRICH AHLFELD.)

ST. LUKE ii. 25-32.

WHEN in the spring the ice melts, and the brooks rush along the woods, the banks grow green. Plants and flowers shoot forth, each after its own kind, although their roots rest in common soil and absorb the same moisture. Lovely spots are seen in dells and in the more shady retreats of the forest.

At its rising the sun lightens up all the clouds in the east, and invests them with varied splendour. The fleecy, the stratified, the accumulated masses, under the same beams gleam with diverse colours.

So in the first days of the history of Jesus Christ! The fountain for all sin and uncleanness gushes out, as it were, in the dark recess of the forest. It flows through the oases of prophecy in one of the great channels of the world's history to distant corners of the earth. At the sun's dawn consider whither its beams spread?

First, upon Israel. They shone on Joseph and Mary, and the shepherds at Bethlehem, and on Simeon and Hannah in the temple. When they shone upon Simeon, he perceived Judah to be too small for the new-born King, who was to be a light to the Gentiles as well as a glory to Israel.

Immediately there came from the East the first heathen, the three wise men, to rejoice in their Saviour. The beams fell on the Gentiles; and the Epiphany remains a mission festival, so long as there are any unconverted upon earth.

The "star from Jacob" shines, too, upon all ages and periods of life. The children of Bethlehem die for the Lord's sake, His first martyrs! As a little child knows nothing of his baptism, and yet in this first and greatest act of the grace of God is blessed, so these innocents were unconsciously blessed in their baptism of blood.

The sun of grace shone upon the shepherds in full manhood amid the toil and cares of life.

Finally, it shone upon the two aged persons, Simeon and Hannah, transfiguring the evening of their days.

Amidst this group, the mother of the Lord excepted, Simeon stands very clearly before you. The children of Bethlehem were unconscious confessors. Weepingly they died. The shepherds see and hear, go and find the little child. They tell it to their neighbours: still none of their words have been handed down. The wise men worship, open their treasures, and quietly return home. Joseph stands a silent form beside the crib.

Simeon sings a Christian song, the first after the angels. After Mary, too, he lays down a Christian confession. She rejoices in God her Saviour. His eyes saw the salvation of all peoples. He dies in the clear consciousness of it.

The home-yearning of the old man is our subject: "Now let thy servant depart in peace."

Consider.—(1) the home; (2) the home-longing; and (3) the home-going.

I.

Beloved, "you have here no continuing city, but you seek one to come." At present homeless, like Simeon ! The apostolic metaphor aptly denotes the transiency of life, "Man is like grass which blooms early, and soon is withered ; at even cut down and shrivelled up." His tabernacle is, as it were, built upon the bank of a river. The water ever rushes along and tears away one fresh piece of the ground after the other upon which it is, until it is overturned.

Amidst your various occupations, your allotted time runs its course. Whether you live in godliness or sin, in industry or slothfulness, in joy or sorrow, in the hope or dread of death, your pilgrimage passes rapidly away. The young may die, but the old must. And what then ?

In the mere fact of death, there is no intimation of a home beyond or above in glory. When Israel in exile dwelt by the waters of Babylon, they hanged their harps upon the willows, and felt properly homeless. They had no hope of return to Canaan until the years of their banishment were over. Canaan, however, was the type of their home above.

Families whose home rights and patrimony may for long years be in suspense, whilst there is uncertainty what share or any share at all may fall to each, have an unhappy feeling of homelessness. Who is to end all doubts and apportion to each his part of the disputed inheritance ?

Beloved, without the earnestness and assurance of faith in the mediation of Christ you cannot acquire your right to the heavenly patrimony. Only in virtue of the merits of Him who, as a babe, was born on Christmas Eve, and whose star on Epiphany arose over

all peoples, can it be secured. Christ came into the world and made it His home in order that you might have a home above. He claimed the rights of citizenship here, in order that you as His brothers, might claim the rights of citizenship in heaven.

So much He expresses in His high priestly prayer : "Father, I will that where I am, those whom Thou hast given Me may be with Me, that they may see the glory which Thou hast given Me, for Thou hast loved Me before the foundation of the world."

So much He expresses in those other words, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto Me." "In My Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, in order that you may be where I am." "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one cometh to the Father but through Me."

II.

In the certainty of the blessed home above, you experience something of Simeon's home-yearning.

You know how fondly highlanders cling to their mountains and valleys. If they have wandered forth into the plains they cannot rest. Although much more necessitous at home, they are inevitably drawn back to it.

Christians are from above. They are now in the strange, poor lowlands. In Scripture language, they "dwell in the tents of Meshech." Hence their daily home-yearning!

Alas, there are those who never awake to the feeling of it. They are here so well. They would ever abide fast bound to earth. The taking leave of joyous life is to them intolerably grievous. The whole love of God, as it appears at Christmas, and on Good Friday, and on Easter morn cannot loose the band, cannot inspire a breath of longing after heaven and freedom. There is wanting the best thing, faith in home, its King and its glory. Poor man, who would here remain and yet cannot: who must away and yet will not!

Others may talk of the pleasure of death, though with them it be not real. If the toil of life be great and its burden heavy, a wish that death would come and relieve them of their yoke, may occasionally escape their lips. Think of the fable of that old man, who tottered along under a burden of wood which he was carrying home. He sat down upon a stone by the way, and sighed, "Oh, that death would come!" Thereupon Death appeared and said: "Here I am; what do you desire of me?" "Oh, nothing further," was the reply, "than to raise my burden and place it again upon my shoulder." There is no deep earnestness in such sighs.

Behold one or two typical characters of true home yearning! The aged Simeon breaks out into the words, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." He has attained the end of his desire on earth, to see Christ with the eye of faith, to receive Him in the arms of love. He who thus has heaven on earth will surely inherit the heaven above.

Simeon's word rings to you like the call of a mariner in spring. "The sea is open. The wind blows favourably, and fills the sails. Weigh the anchor, and cross over to the other coast—to home!"

St. Paul, too, would gladly away from this earth. Wherefore? Not because the apostolic office, with its toil and persecution, was too hard. Oh no! Of that he says not a word. His Lord alone draws him. He would much the rather take his leave of the body and be present with Him. It were so much better, if otherwise it were not expedient to remain until the Lord Himself determine the time of his departure.

Take a modern example of real home yearning.

Ernest, the godly, of Gotha, in his youth fought under the banner of Gustavus Adolphus, the champion of the Protestant cause in Germany during the Thirty Years War. In his manhood and more advanced age, it fell to him to build up the kingdom of God in his land, and to heal the wounds inflicted in that grievous war. At the time when he was seized by his last illness, he enjoyed the highest worldly prosperity. He was securely seated on a princely throne, and his subjects honoured and loved him as a father. His wife sat by his sick bed. His children, to whom he could confidently leave his sceptre, stood around him. Nothing was wanting to his earthly happiness. And yet he longed after home. Morning and evening he made them sing hymns of death with the accompaniment of instrumental music. Often he would have a hymn repeated by his wife, and knit to it conversations of the sweet joys of eternal life, and of the sweetest of all, the love of Jesus Christ. Once he asked those standing around whether to them the gospel appeared so sweet as it did to him. In the fact that "God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son, that all who believe in Him might not perish but have everlasting life," he took such delight that he would not give it up for the whole world, yea, for thousands of worlds,

because the strongest devil could not upset the ground of faith which is in it.

Such was a home yearning on good ground and of proper nature. God grant it may be enkindled in you all! On him who has it the beams from the Star of Jacob fall.

III.

Beloved, every death is a parting from the present, an appearing before God's throne. But it is a home-going alone to those who can say with Simeon, "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

Have your eyes then seen the Saviour in His glory, in His love to you, in His sacrifice for you? Oh, that you could all say yes, and if you cannot, delay not to realize it. It is unspeakably precious to be readily detached from this life, and to go home in peace. The child of the world departs with terror, befooled by himself and others up to the last hour. He goes thence, but knows not whither. In peace he cannot, for the godless have no peace. The believing Christian has peace. Justified by faith in Christ Jesus he has it. His sins are forgiven. What lay between God and him, the Reconciler has removed. The child goes home in peace. No bitterness remains in his heart.

When your Lord hung upon the cross and celebrated His home-going: when the thorns stuck in His brow, and the nails in His hands and feet, there was, nevertheless, no wrath in His heart. Of His last seven words, none of them blamed or condemned Caiaphas, or Pilate, or Judas, who were all comprehended in the great prayer, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

There peace is breathed around. A father or a mother on dying blesses the little ones whom they leave behind. With their last words they invoke the Prince of Peace to be near and dwell in and amongst them, and so they fall asleep.

In a German prince there was just now set before you a pattern of proper home yearning. Let us cite one of home going.

A citizen of Lubec, a merchant, had been given up as hopelessly ill by his physician. He desired his friends to let the city musicians come and play at his bedside, in order to realize the sentiment of David, "Thou, Lord, hast turned my mourning into joy." His wife used evasions because she feared it might bring him an evil report throughout the neighbourhood. But he insisted they should be called. To the question, "what should they play?" he requested them to play and sing the hymn, "Heartily love I Thee, O Lord." When they began, the dying man turned his face toward the wall. When they ended, his wife asked him whether he desired another? He had, however, fallen asleep in the course of the song of victory.

XXXII.

The Boy Jesus' first Visit to the Temple.

(SUGGESTED BY THE GERMAN OF COUARD.)

"Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?"

ST. LUKE ii. 42-52.

THE Lord's youthful visit to the temple forms the subject of discourse.

There are three points—(1) His coming; (2) His tarrying; (3) His return home.

I.

As a boy of twelve years He went up to Jerusalem. It was the usual custom amongst the Jews for boys of His age to take part in the celebration of the great festivals. So early the consciousness of what is holy was unfolded in Him; His longing to join in the beautiful divine service found expression.

From His example your children ought to be taught how well it befits them to accustom themselves to the public worship of God. Childhood and youth are the stages in human life when hearts have the greatest flexibility; when minds are most susceptible of impressions, be it for good or evil. How salutary therefore at that age to intensify to the utmost degree possible

the impression of the good and beautiful ; to check the evil and perverse which is wont to bud in their young hearts ; and to foster the consciousness of the holy and divine. Where can these results be better attained than in the house of God ?

Do not say the spiritual unfolding of your children is too little advanced to expect benefit from the early frequenting divine services. If you may not pre-suppose in them such extraordinary maturity of understanding as manifested itself in the child Jesus, and amazed the wise and learned of that day, you must at least assume in them a lively feeling and responsive sympathy to whatever is sacred, to wit prayer or converse of the soul with God, the sweet strains of Zion's melodies, and the holy admonitions of the Word. Experience sufficiently attests that young people usually see and hear and understand more than is supposed.

It must appear to you very desirable to place such a counter-balance against so many prejudicial impressions readily conveyed to their minds from the wicked and naughty world around. You who from tender years have kept fast to the religious uses and assemblies of Christians can surely testify that the love for God's house, the deep and unique reverence for holy things, have ever since gone on strengthening, and have proved a safeguard against the manifold temptations and seductions to which life is exposed. Many who now wander upon the broad path of levity, of pleasure, and of vice, would have been preserved from errors and the snares of the devil if a public churchly religious consciousness had been early implanted in them.

Therefore, beloved children, learn from Jesus' example. Come gladly here to fashion your hearts to the holy

frame of heaven's kingdom. Rejoice and thank God that opportunity is given you and never slight it. Most heedfully listen to the voice which says, "Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou wilt say, I have no pleasure in them."

The boy Jesus, however, does not come alone. He is in the company of parents and other friends. To celebrate in holy state the Pascal festival was the concern of the whole community. You parents lead the way by your example. Youth is to be conducted by pious guides. The consciousness of holy and divine things has to be awakened and trained. Such is your duty.

Would it were more sacredly performed! That the grown-up people, fathers and mothers in special, would learn of the pious Joseph and the godly Mary, what is their responsibility to childhood! The children to be sure are to be presented to the Lord at holy baptism. In your hand they are every Sunday to be led to the house of God; until later on they come themselves to be confirmed and conducted to the altar of the Crucified. By your instruction, and pattern in character and in the whole course of your life, they are to a large extent to be educated for the heavenly kingdom.

What on the other hand is to be looked for in the growing-up generation, if the parents themselves set a sorry or criminal example of indifference, or dislike towards God's word and Church, preaching and sacraments, as is unfortunately not seldom the case, and nip or destroy the germs of goodness in their little hearts!

Whilst we exhort the youth, and remind them of the truths of our holy faith; whilst we earnestly urge

them diligently to frequent God's house, to read the Bible, and to hear sermons; whilst we seek to instil reverence, and delight in religious worship; what should the children think of it, seeing their parents never go to Church, never read the Word of God? No prayer at home, no singing of hymns, no regard for Church seasons, preaching ignored, sacraments despised!

What should the children think? They either feel that their parents neglect their holy duties, which is a very sad thing, or they regard our exhortations with indifference, whilst they thus reason with themselves: "What our parents despise so much we need not highly value." Very sad, since thus through the bad example of their guardians the work of the Spirit of God is frustrate.

What has the rising generation to look for, if they grow up without the fear of God, and learn from childhood to esteem so lightly what is holy? Beloved, think earnestly. Take Mary and Joseph as your pattern. Remember what the Lord says, "Let the little children come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God." If you faithfully do your part to train up the little ones entrusted to your care, you will be without reproach. They may not decry you if they perversely choose and walk in the broad way to perdition.

II.

The festival ended, Joseph and Mary, in company of friends and acquaintances, set out on the way home. At the end of the first day's journey they are alarmed, because Jesus is not amongst them. They return with haste to Jerusalem to seek Him. After three days of

anxious search they find Him amongst the Rabbis or Jewish doctors, listening to and asking them questions.

How significant that lingering in the temple! How much you may learn from it! Note, first, His holy longing to acquire knowledge and wisdom. What He asks, relates not to worldly or vain things. His words are suggestive of the highest and holiest concerns. The Sacred Oracles busy Him. Much explanation is needed, satisfaction for His inquiring spirit, nourishment for His heart.

How is it with you? Are you also, while you tarry in the sanctuary so altogether absorbed in devotion, so wholly occupied with the contemplation of the marvels of God's grace, so eager to learn from Holy Scripture your duties and responsibilities?

Alas! How often do you bring the things of the world, your "ploughs, your plots, and pleasures," with you into the sanctuary! Not the desire to hear God's word! Oh no, mere idle curiosity! Not confirmation in your most holy faith! Oh no, a mere tickling of the fancy and play of feeling! No application of the truths heard to your heart and life! Oh no, but the looking askance and spying your neighbours' faults!

Note, secondly, the answer which the boy Jesus gave to His parents: "Know ye not that I must be in My Father's house, or about what concerns my Father?"

He thus justified His tarrying in the temple. An inner impulse of His heart moved Him to seek fellowship with God. Communion with God was a need that must be satisfied.

What an important lesson! Union with God the most pressing and necessary need of your souls, your true destiny! Do you feel it to be indispensable to

you? That your heart can nowhere find true rest but in the living God? That otherwise you cannot be assured of salvation?

Through the word here preached faith gains new power, love new life, hope new support; and faith, hope, and love form the heavenly band which unites you with God.

Would you, then, learn your exalted destiny, gladly frequent the house of God. Tarry, question, and meditate. Say with Jesus, It is fitting that you be in your heavenly Father's house, deeply concerned about all that is God's, more especially your sonship and fellowship with Him.

Jesus in the temple bears witness of Himself as the Son of God. With peculiar emphasis He calls God His Father. For Joseph and Mary it was all very enigmatical. "They understood not the word that He spake unto them." We understand what He meant. We are conscious, too, of the dignity to which He has raised us. Through Him with filial confidence we call God Father. On His account we say, "Behold what a love the Father hath bestowed on us that we should be called the children of God." In the Father's house the message of reconciliation, the main content of the gospel, sounds in our ears, "To as many as receive Christ, He gives power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe on His name."

What an elevated feeling! God your Father! You His children through faith in Christ! Trust fully His grace, His love, His good pleasure. Cherish the blessed hope of being citizens of heaven, heirs of glory. In the consciousness of this dignity, be strong to bear the sufferings of this life, to conquer in all the battles and temptations of this naughty world. Herein lies the

highest comfort to penitent souls, the assurance of the forgiveness of sin, and the adoption as God's children for Christ's sake.

III.

If the coming of Jesus to the temple and His tarrying there be full of instruction, no less is His going away. "He went down with His parents to Nazareth, and was subject to them." His mother kept all His words in her heart. He went on increasing in wisdom as in stature, and in favour both with God and man.

Jesus Christ willingly laid aside the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, and, for a few years, within the limits of finitude, dimly mirrored as men were able to bear it, the glory of the uniquely begotten Son, full of grace and truth.

Though conscious of His inherent dignity, He for your salvation and bliss lived in all humility as man, and became subject to all human ordinances and relationships. The Lord of all willingly reconciled Himself to all the lowly conditions of human life, was faithful to its varied duties as your sinless Exemplar, and surely fulfilled the law.

In domestic matters He was obedient to His parents, and carried over into after life the divine intuition of the Fatherhood of God which in the temple had come to clear consciousness. It never after decayed or disappeared. It remained a pervading consciousness. It extended its heavenly splendour over His whole course of life.

How full of instruction! What here comes to consciousness, to wit, the pious feelings and resolutions which have been awakened, should not again decay when you

leave church, but should go with you to your homes, and should glorify your whole life. This divine influence should penetrate all human relationships and sanctify every earthly connexion. In short, you are taught to be not forgetful hearers, but zealous doers of the Word.

Beloved, take with you into your daily life the blessing which you here experience, and like your Divine Pattern, go on increasing in wisdom and in favour. What you hear in the house of God practise in your life.

You, children, in your homes, be more joyfully obedient and subject to your parents and to all others who are placed in authority over you.

You, spouses, more heartily love one another.

You, parents, care for the eternal welfare, as well as for the temporal prosperity and happiness, of your children with greater faithfulness than heretofore.

You, Christians of all conditions, show that God's word is not in vain, but bears fruit in you, its preaching not unblessed in heart or life. Like Jesus, let it be your meat and drink to do the will of your heavenly Father.

XXXIII.

Christ's First Sermon at Nazareth.

(FROM THE GERMAN OF CARL SCHWARZ.)

"He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read," etc.

ST. LUKE iv. 16-27.

WHAT is the imperishable truth which remains when all else changes? What is the indestructible kernel which you should preserve and keep sacred when the many hard husks are broken and the empty integuments are stripped off?

Such is a frequent question in our day. It is not the worst men who ask it, not the unbelieving and superficial, not the doubters and the scoffers. Oh no! It is earnest minds searching and struggling after truth. It is those whose warm hearts cannot and will not renounce the sanctities of their youth, will not discard what approves itself to their inner being, what verifies itself as a comfort and a power in the hard battle of life; whose clear understanding at the same time may indeed not be much perplexed, though not altogether able to reject the penetrating doubt, not able to appropriate all that belongs to dark ages past, all the wonderfully decorated husks and drapery with which faith has occasionally been tricked out.

That which is enduring, eternal, indestructible in your faith is the Christianity of Jesus, the gospel He Himself preached on earth. To this clearest well of truth ever turn back, and from it draw the water of eternal life. By its infallible standard measure all that belongs to faith, as well the evangelical narrative itself which reports so many glorious things of Christ, as the declarations of the great apostles, St. Paul, St. Peter, and St. John—much more all the later doctrines and institutions of the following hundreds of years, both of the Catholic and the Protestant Church!

Ever again turn back to the original, plain, creative form of Christianity, the blessed words of Christ's own mouth. Note in special the first sermon which He preached at Nazareth. Is not the whole gospel there comprised in small compass, the most beautiful and truest self-testimony of Christ, of His own being and calling, of His Divine mission upon earth? He is the Comforter, the Deliverer, the Saviour of humanity.

It is not the earnest word of repentance at the beginning of St. Matthew's and St. Mark's Gospels you here listen to. Neither is it that sublime notion of the immediate nearness of the heavenly kingdom, but the most natural, most friendly, most condescending words, the real evangel or glad news. It reminds you of that other word: "Come unto me, all ye who are weary and heavy laden." It recalls that wonderful, heart-touching series of beatitudes, Blessed the poor, the sorrowful, the persecuted, hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

Consider, then, somewhat closely the prophetic passage from Isaiah which forms the subject of Christ's introductory discourse: (1) the interpretation; (2) the pervading tone; and (3) the deeper contents.

I.

First, the interpretation. How living and clear! You are, in imagination, transported to the synagogue at Nazareth on the Sabbath, where the Lord appeared in the midst of the assembled congregation.

You know that the synagogue services instituted by godly Israelites or those of them learned in the law, after their return from Babylonish exile, were auxiliary and preparative to the temple service. They were the original type and groundwork of Christian worship. They comprised prayers and psalms, sectional readings from the books of Moses and the prophets, with expositions and applications of the previously read lessons.

It is said of the Lord, "He stood up," an intimation of a desire to read, which was unhesitatingly complied with. The minister handed to Him the roll of the prophet Isaiah. A reading from it was upon the calendar. What should be the particular topic of discourse was left to Himself. On unrolling the volume, no long search was needed. He lighted directly on that glorious place at the beginning of the sixty-first chapter, surely known a long time before, and deeply engraven on His memory, a rich mine of truth, a centre-point of His faith, longings, and hopes.

What in this most beautiful of the Messianic prophecies had been declared of old to the people of Israel, to the poor, the sorrowful, those sunk in slavery, carried off into Babylonish exile, once so glorious and highly favoured people? Why, emancipation from imprisonment and ignominy, restoration from banishment to their homes in the Holy Land, a fresh outpouring of the grace of God.

Mark well how Christ opens up the Holy Scriptures. Not in a narrow, literal, outside sense. Oh no! He dwells not upon the letter, but mounts above all to the spirit, to the inner intimations of the Messiah and His Messianic kingdom. For Him the husks, the sensible images drawn from the outward fortunes of the elect people, raised higher expectations, suggested spiritual ideas, became adumbrations of the deeper contents of faith.

At that place of the prophet Isaiah, the deliverance of Israel from a temporal bondage, the leading them back from exile and disgrace, the raising them to a newer freedom and glory amongst the nations, was hoped for and promised. What an expectation! What an image of the golden future for that deeply humbled people, who sat by the waters of Babylon and wailed their sad lot, who could never forget Jerusalem and its temple, whose harps were hanged upon the willows, never more strung to joyous song!

After the Lord had read that touching passage, He said, "To-day this scripture is fulfilled." To the poor in spirit the gracious message is a precious balm and rich comfort. The slaves of sin and Satan are freed from their otherwise hopeless bondage. The faint-hearted and crushed in spirit are healed and raised up. The spiritually blind see. Those dead to the higher life are quickened. For the year of grace, the Lord's acceptable time has come.

Such was His manner of explaining and applying the Old Testament Scriptures, in particular the predictions of the prophets.

He spiritually remodelled, raised, and illustrated the old Messianic images, drawn from the mighty kings and deliverers, the rulers after David's heart—David's

throne, too, with crown and sceptre, to whom heathen princes should do homage and bring tribute. Not so much the jubilous acclamation, "David's Son!" did He accept, for He rebuked those who thought thus to honour Him. He appropriated to Himself that one most cherished of all the glorious Messianic names, "the Son of Man," thereby to signify that nothing human is foreign to Him, that He stands in the ranks amidst fighting brothers, that He came to share their pains and restore them to the Divine sonship they had lost.

He declared clearly and distinctly that "His kingdom is not of this world." In the fuller consciousness of the coming age, He unsparingly stripped off Himself all that golden froth and lordly glitter with which the Jewish traditions had surrounded the Messiah. He wished only to be an elect servant of God, an anointed one in the kingdom of truth. "For this end," He said, "was I born, and came into the world to bear witness to the truth."

So He ever explained the predictions of the prophets in the spirit of them. Such also should be your relation to Holy Scripture. Not to the letter and outside glitter should you cling. Not ever demand for the present much of what is past and become obsolete. Not long after outside sensible wonders, and upon them support and build up faith, as once the men of Nazareth wished to see great things, whom the Lord sent back with earnest words.

Oh no! You should long after and ground your certainty on such wonders as still to-day happen in your own souls, which with spiritual eye you contemplate and with living heart are conscious of amidst the changes you here experience. Thus, above all in Holy Scripture, mount from the letter to the spirit, to seek

and find Christ Himself, to penetrate to His heart, to His living image, to the pulse-beat of His love.

II.

Secondly, what is the pervading tone which forms the keynote of this first sermon of the Lord?

Mark the expression, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. Therefore He appointed and sent me." This high and proud word with which Isaiah declares his Divine mission, the Lord in a higher, indeed in the highest sense, applies to Himself.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Him." He does not come or speak of Himself. The Father sent Him. He could not otherwise declare so clearly what was manifest in His deepest consciousness that He was the Anointed of God. Messiah really means nothing else. Anointed not as earthly kings and priests with holy ointment, but with the fulness of the Divine Spirit.

There is, however, another word which we desire to recall to mind, full of meaning for the tone which rings through Christ's preaching. It is said, "They all gave witness to Him, and wondered at His gracious words." His gracious words! These made the first permanent irresistible impression on His hearers.

Wherein consisted that graciousness, that charm, that benevolence, which gave an unction to His every word? Wherein consisted that wonderful fascination, that heart-winning power, which collected the people round Him, which captivated the disciples, which drew even a Nicodemus and other Pharisees to Him? Yea, which not alone deeply touched the hearts of His contemporaries, but of which you are still to-day sensible to be redolent in the dead formal letter of Holy Scripture,

which you contemplate through the thousand years night of the past, which is therefrom wafted to you by the breath of His Spirit?

Whilst He opened up the Scriptures, He laid bare His own heart. Yes; His word was steeped in His love, in His philanthropy, in His sympathetic fellow feeling. In Him was fulfilled the word of the psalmist, "Thou art the most beautiful amongst the children of men; full of grace are thy lips; wherefore God hath blessed thee for ever."

Gracious were His words, not only because they were so charming to listen to, because they were so pensive, and at the same time so bright and clear. Oh no! but because they announced comfort and joy, because they were full of love, because they were blown around with the breath of peace.

Is it not still so to-day? Do you not experience that breath of this mild Spirit penetrating irresistibly into your hearts, and concealing in itself rich blessed fruit?

III.

Consider, thirdly, the contents of this first sermon of Christ. The gospel here announced to humanity, to the poor, the sick, the prisoners, the blind, to the bruised and broken-hearted, is that of deliverance, or salvation.

Behold the one thing which remains in all changes of time, which endures when heaven and earth pass away; the eternal evangel of redemption, the one thing after which the heart longs, which refreshes and comforts, of which none of you may come short.

Salvation! What a weighty word!

The bands and chains which sin had forged around your heart will be shattered and loosed. The prisoners will be led out of the dark dungeons of guilt and misery. The wanderers, the banished and homeless, will be brought back from foreign and strange lands to the eternal home, to the Father's house!

Who amongst you born in this low condition, and struggling amongst things of earth, does not belong to those poor ones, even though he may riot in the fulness of riches? Who does not feel himself at times poor and naked, in the depths of his soul, needy, sick, and wretched, hungering after the bread of eternal life, thirsting for the cool refreshing waters?

Whose heart has not been wounded and broken with the blows of fortune, with the faithlessness of men, with the prejudices and narrowness of friends?

Who needs not the balsam which Christ will lay upon the sick soul? Who belongs not to the blind, who for so long, often through a whole lifetime, are deluded and befooled with the false sheen and glitter of the things around, to whom the light of truth and of self-knowledge never really penetrates.

We all less or more belong to them, to those to whom Christ cries, "Come unto Me all ye who are weary and heavy laden. I shall quiet the pains and smarts of your soul. I shall give you rest;" to those to whom He still says to-day, "Stand up, my brother, be comforted. Thy sins are forgiven. Rise up and walk."

These words penetrate your inmost souls. These longings of the spirit never cease, so long as men's hearts are broken and contrite. After this rest you all yearn amid the disquietudes of time, the storms and bustle of human passion.

You do not find rest until you have found it in

Christ. He is the Saviour and Redeemer. In Him you get what you need. Here in His blessed Gospel, grace is freely offered. Upon faith and repentance there follows salvation from sin, eternal redemption from deep corruption. This need of salvation, deliverance of human hearts from the power and guilt of sin will ever abide.

Behold, then, the eternal kernel of the Gospel! All else whether doctrines or symbolic formulæ, which the later Church has framed; all the glorious decorations and other non-essentials, which may have grown up around our Christian worship, must sink into insignificance or change, at one time gain ascendancy, at another decline to nothingness, but this first sermon of Christ, the Gospel of redemption and deliverance will abide immovable when heaven and earth shall have passed away.

XXXIV.

The Merciful Heart of Jesus.

(FROM THE GERMAN OF CHR. ERNST LUTHARDT.)

ST. MATTHEW ix. 35-38.

BELOVED, the season of Epiphany is devoted to the consideration of the active life and works of Christ. In the Gospels you see how the Lord went about as the Teacher and Saviour of His people, and did good to all. A rich picture is portrayed to you. Jesus stands far above all the worldly characters of which history elsewhere informs you. To the historians of that time, however, whose pencil has recorded and handed down its occurrences, only the slightest rumours of His life had come. He moved in a circumscribed theatre. Yet His significance surpasses that of every other in history. By Him the whole destiny of humanity was determined.

History informs you of many great men whose achievements have exercised an influence far and wide on the progress of the race. But here is one greater than the greatest and the highest which all the world else is able to present to you. The consideration of a significant life has ever something fascinating. You observe the real influences which goes forth from it. But here you have a life whose influences extend to the whole world and to all times, yea beyond time into eternity.

For it is the history of eternity which is here decided for you.

But not merely is it the significance and import of the work of Jesus which fascinates you. It is not less the moral sublimity of His person, the Spirit of holiness with which all His words and actions are redolent.

Take the life of the noblest men. In every one you will find some blot or other, shady sides of character, dark points in life which you would wish to pass over, and for which you have no other excuse than that every one, however high morally or intellectually he may be, must pay his tribute to the weaknesses of humanity.

How often it happens that you for a long time regard with admiration or reverence the person of a great man, but when you begin to step up closer to him and discover the spots which disfigure the fair portraiture, you painfully feel your former regard diminish, and regret the vanished illusion.

How very different it is here ! The more you contemplate the person of Jesus in its several features, so much the more your reverence increases. Ever holier and higher He appears to you. Ever more you bow in lowly awe before Him.

But not only His holiness, His heart-winning graciousness much more captivates you. When you represent to yourselves the single scenes of His life, they are all so simple and quiet. Every one seems more beautiful and heart captivating than another. You know not to which you should give the preference. When you think of Him sitting amongst His disciples and teaching them how to pray ; or taking the little children in His arms, as exemplars of humility, embracing and blessing them ; or when in His friends' house at Bethany Mary sits at His feet listening to His gracious words ; or the woman who

was a sinner washing His feet with her tears and receiving from Him the blessed consciousness of forgiveness; or when He stepped to the widow of Nain and raised up her son; or presented to Jairus his daughter, or howsoever you choose to reckon up all the other single pictures the one after the other. They of themselves in abundant number are readily suggested to you, the one more lovely than the other. Note that which makes them so captivating is His merciful heart, the graciousness of God become incarnate.

His merciful heart is our subject.

“When He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd.”

I.

Contemplate first the description of His sympathizing mercy. The evangelist gives you in a few strokes a picture of the Saviour's activity in the time of His Galilean labours. From Capernaum He travelled through that country on all sides, everywhere bringing help, proclaiming His gracious words. Upon the Sermon on the Mount there follows a succession of His wonderful works. All depict Him to you as the Prophet mighty in word and deed. This representation is concluded with the words which you have just heard, which give you a look into His heart. Oh, do not remain standing at the outside occurrences! The outer history has a hidden background, which is His heart. Oh, look into His inner life, into the pulse beats of His love! One thing you perceive there which you may comprise in one word, His mercy, ceaseless and untiring.

The Holy Scriptures occasionally contain words which

disclose to you the inner movements of the heart, the hidden incidents of the spiritual life. It belongs, however, to the grand simplicity and sobriety, to the moderation which is peculiar to the gospel, that it generally informs you only of outer occurrences. It is left to yourselves to forebode and feel the deeper background. Only with one word at times does the narrator remove the curtain which keeps from your view the hidden incidents of the soul's life, and makes you see through the outer history into the secret laboratory of the heart, but then also so much the more touchingly. Thus there is here a word which comprises in itself a world of feeling. "He was moved with compassion."

Shortly before St. Matthew tells you of his own call. What follows are events of which he was witness. His words are significant. "When Jesus saw the people He was moved with pity." Behold what first of all most arrested the attention of the newly called disciple! It was the Lord's deeply sympathetic heart.

Well, St. Matthew is a witness of His works of power, but most of all of His works of love. He is a witness of His reproving words, but most of all of His words of mercy. The soul of the Master's life is to him a boundless heaving sea of compassion for the poor, the forsaken, and the lost. Such is the feature which most of all won St. Matthew and impressed him indelibly. Such is the ideal of mercy you have to portray to yourselves.

Well, upon His brow majesty was enthroned. From His face holiness shone. His eyes indeed could look wrathfully, and His hands could rein and curb the storm and surge of a mighty tempest. But amidst all the manifestations of His majesty, of His inflexible truth and severe earnestness, there shone the quiet splendour of boundless condescension. Amidst all His words and

works of power there was manifested His infinite mildness and graciousness. Even when His keenest and most biting reproofs were spoken and His eyes flamed with holy wrath, His intent was to smite the conscience if thereby He might touch the heart and save the sinner.

Not a customary human mercy, oh no! that has its limits, and becomes too soon spent. His mercy was boundless as the ocean, His sympathy inexhaustible. He is the Revealer of your heavenly Father's compassion. He is the eternal compassion which in the fulness of time came in person to seek and to save.

When you have become wavering in your thoughts about Christ, and do not know by what to hold fast, amidst the many voices which in our day stun and deafen, and cause to err, and leave you no rest, and yet you would come to certainty, here is the point from which you must start in order to make further progress, to wit, the compassionate heart of the Saviour, the revelation of Divine mercy, the manifestation of eternal love! Hence learn one main feature of God's glory manifested in the flesh. Your joy and comfort in life and in death depends on it.

II.

Consider, in the second place, the occasion of the Lord's compassion. He saw the people pining away and scattered like sheep without a shepherd. In His journeys around Galilee, from place to place, the sight moved His soul with painful sympathy. Not their outer condition moved Him so painfully. Oh no! Galilee was a prosperous land. It was richly peopled all over, much more than our own country. It nourished

its inhabitants bounteously. You cannot make inferences from its present state to those times. It is now ruined and marred. It, indeed, bears still the traces of its earlier beauty and fertility, but only faint traces. If a sufficiency of that which belongs to the nourishment and necessity of life and an easy outer existence can make a people happy, the Galileans were happy under their vines and fig trees. But man liveth not by bread alone. Even here there was not wanting manifold distress, to wit, the host of evils and suffering which are the sad consequence of sin, and the heritage of our race. You read much in the Gospel of the sick and ill who were brought to Jesus to be treated. You see plainly enough with what painful emotion and inner sympathy He addressed Himself to the noble ministry of love. In reminiscence of the Lord's deep sympathy the Evangelist makes use of that word of Isaiah: "He bore our sicknesses and took upon Himself our pains."

A greater distress affected Him, the spiritual destitution of the people, their religious neglect and forsakenness, their manifold moral ruin. They were like shepherdless sheep. The shepherds, the priests and scribes, sat complacently enough at Jerusalem. Only rarely came one to Galilee and interested himself in the poor and ignorant. Susceptibility was here. You see it from the glad welcome Jesus met with. His disciples were almost all Galileans. But this susceptibility had been allowed to waste. Such inner spiritual misery, which lay open before the Lord's eyes, profoundly touched Him.

Beloved, you see from His example how you should form your judgment of the condition of a people, of your own condition. You so readily let yourselves be deceived by a good outward appearance, instead of

going to the bottom and keeping the main matter in view. But the main matter is, how you stand to your God. This inner religious life is the proper life. Your life may be outwardly ever so well ordered. Your intellectual life may be ever so well gifted and cultured. You may, notwithstanding, be spoiled and ruined, if your relation to God be marred, if this innermost life of your soul be neglected. For it is that which decides concerning you, that alone! That is your proper being; it abides for ever. All other succumbs to time. This, then, is the proper plumb and level of your judgment.

“When He saw the people He was moved with compassion, for they languished and were scattered like sheep which have no shepherd.” Is that true only for that time and not also for yours? You need not go far in the first instance. Indeed, you should have a heart for all men. The passage now before you has a proper mission ring. You cannot depict the heathen better than in these words—languishing, scattered and perishing. The heathen have immortal souls, and are designed for salvation both here and hereafter. It is a grievous matter, if you ponder it well, that Christendom does not yet comprise a third part of humanity. Surely no one who knows and understands can say that the heathen are happy in their shepherdless and neglected condition.

Of the nations of antiquity who led the van in culture and civilization, you yet say how evilly they were situated, how infinitely much you have advanced beyond them! If you regard their moral and religious life it was a sad one. What now of the ruined heathen world of the present?

You need not, however, go so far. You do not find it so much different in Christendom itself from what

the passage before you depicts the old Jewish Church. Think not merely of ruined Christian nations at some distant time or other, but of those which stand upon the summit of spiritual privilege! When, for example, you are told of many thousands in our large cities, who all their life never listen to the word of Christ, and claim no share in the blessings of the Gospel; to have immortal souls and yet live without God, without religion, without faith, without comfort and without hope! It is awful to think of it.

You abide at home amongst your own people. But how many from amongst you have emigrated and will emigrate into foreign parts, engage in dishonourable businesses, give themselves up to a disgraceful life and go to wreck, without any one interesting themselves in them, pitifully go to wreck in body and soul! Or, others drawn to the great cities, to a London or a Paris, who prolong a wretched existence in the most outcast corners! Or, as so many travelling young men in foreign countries join themselves to those gambling and godless societies and clubs which make it their task, it is dreadful to think of it, to convert every person they meet into a personal enemy of God! The travellers or tourists hear those infidel and devilish teachers. They lose the faith of their youth, and bring with them to their homes the poison from abroad. When you regard all these people, if only a little of the merciful heart of Jesus be in you, will you not like Him deeply feel compassion?

You, however, abide in your own neighbourhood. You all know and speak of the night side of town society. You are so accustomed to it that you think it must be so. But when you in a lively manner place before your mind how many poor creatures every year

go to wreck in body and soul, children of our people, adherents of our Church, baptized Christians, immortal souls called to salvation, lost for time and eternity! When you reflect and figure to yourselves, how much distress and misery, trouble and heart-ache, surround you on all sides, concealed by the walls of houses and of chambers, or by the dark curtain of night, when once all these veils are taken away, can you continue any longer joyous or hopeful in life?

Beloved, never forget that the source of all trouble and distress is sin. The deepest affliction is the inner wound, the ruin of soul, the separation from God. This the crowning misery which makes you eternally wretched, is not merely where ignorance and indigency abound, but also wherever plenty is and satin and silk adorn the person, and the richest culture embellishes the mind. Not the man of property, not the man of culture, not the man of knowledge, not the man of honour or of work; all that is not the man himself. These are all his outward investment or dress; they are not the man himself. He should, indeed, work, acquire, possess, educate himself and so forth. But behind it all stands the man of eternity, the real man, with whom only the one thing is in question, not knowledge, not power, not opulence or property, but his real being, whether he be of God. This alone decides for ever.

You may be rich, witty, honoured, and yet poor and wretched, inwardly woful, spoiled and ruined. In vain you veil your inner poverty by outward adornments, and seek to conceal the emptiness of your soul. What avails all this outside life which you must leave behind? What avails all your knowledge and power and wealth which yet does not make you happy? What avail all the great men whom you admire, of whom none can be

your intercessor, when you must step before God, and await the sentence of eternity?

All that, however richly it may accrue to you, is only the means of life. The aim and end of it all is, that you live in God and belong to Him.

Who belongs to Him? Not one by nature, but surely you all do according to His purpose of grace; in actuality those alone who allow themselves to be drawn out of their state of alienation from God. "You all go astray like sheep." But One there is who is the Shepherd of your souls, who in His great rich heart feels the whole distress of humanity, and bears it, on whom more depends than on yourselves, Jesus Christ, who has provided help for you.

III.

What is the help? "The harvest is plenteous, but the labourers are few: Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest that He send forth labourers." Labourers! That is the help—Prayer! That is the right way to help. If you can do nothing else, this you can do. Pray for labourers. Workers are the help. Not institutions, regulations, forms, and such-like! The help is personal: from the heart it must originate. The mercy which from compassion to others touches the heart, and places your person at their service is the help. But the fountain of help is the heart of Jesus. He has become the revelation of eternal mercy to the world. He has brought it down from heaven to earth, and has wrought out redemption for all times. He has become the helper by His life, still more by His death. When He was raised upon the cross, He began to draw all men unto Him.

From the cross, and with the word of the cross, His disciples have gone forth, and gathered souls into the Church, the home of salvation which their Master founded upon earth for the manifestation of His mercy. The history of the Church is the history of mercy. Its call is to proclaim the mercy of Christ, and to save the lost.

Beloved, these are not empty words. I appeal to those who have experienced salvation in Christ Jesus. Is not this the fountain of blessing, the full and entire power of healing for your deepest wounds? What avails all else if the innermost life be not made whole? Review your past history. How did it become different with you? It is the old and yet ever new story of the heart, the uniform experience of the saved.

You aforetime went on your own way, never it may be without better impulses, or nobler struggles. You were a proud child of man, and followed your own selfish and wilful courses onward toward ruin of soul and perdition, until the word of God seized you inwardly and would not let you go further.

Your conversion was tedious. Unweariedly the Lord followed you, ceaselessly struggling with your resisting nature, until He became too strong for you, until you surrendered yourself to Him to be His for ever, His alone! Once that word, spoken to a sick man in Israel of old, "Be comforted, my son, thy sins are forgiven thee," came home to you, you enjoyed a serene untroubled peace, and as a reconciled child, reposed securely in the bosom of your God and Father. You know well that history. Comprised in one word it is no other than the old confession of the Christian consciousness, "To me mercy has befallen."

XXXV.

“Forward in the Holy Course and Fight.”

(FROM THE GERMAN OF MAX FROMMEL.)

1 COR. ix. 24-x. 5.

ST. PAUL compares life to a fight and to a race. In anticipation of his near end he wrote to Timothy: “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith.”

On the threshold of death he looked back upon the noble warfare in which, accoutred with the spiritual panoply, to wit, the cuirass of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith, and the sword of the spirit, he had fought so nobly.

His life also was like a race, in which, as a messenger of God, having the pilgrim hat upon his head, his loins girt, the pilgrim shoes on his feet, the pilgrim staff in his hand, he had borne the joyous message of Christ through all countries, from Damascus to Rome, and beyond to Spain and Britain.

Now, when so near the end, he saw in spirit the pinnacles of the city of God in the morning sunshine, he exclaimed, “I have finished my course.”

But the fight and the race is one with faith. “I have kept the faith.” Faith is the beginning, the middle, and the end of Christian life. It is the sum of

the work of God. When the Jews asked, "What shall we do that we may work the work of God?" the Lord answered, "God's work is to believe on Him whom He has sent." From that ground all good works go forward in you.

The herald's cry in the Epistle now before you is: Forward in the holy course, and fight manfully. (1) Corinth's similitude stimulates; (2) Israel's retrogression warns; and (3) the heavenly crown beckons.

I.

The figure of speech here used is drawn from the Grecian contests held before the gates of Corinth. The games were national festivals. Great crowds were gathered together from all the different states of the fatherland. The spectators were accommodated in a large amphitheatre, many rows of seats rising the one above the other. Their gaze was fixed on the runners, who, at the herald's signal, rushed along the course, at the end of which there was a pillar, where the umpire sat, who stretched out a crown of olive leaves to him who first touched it.

The conqueror, crowned with this token of victory, received the plaudits of the multitude, and was conducted to his home in triumph, where the highest marks of distinction awaited him.

Beloved, the Christian life is a race after the imperishable garland, which beckons you toward its goal. The spectators are the holy angels. The course is ordained for you by Christ, fenced off from the world, its limits the Divine commands, its sphere your calling and condition. Therein run, neither to the right nor to the left, ever within the prescribed boundaries.

The preacher delivers the herald's message: "So run that ye may attain." The umpire is God, who, at the end of life, holds out the crown to the faithful conqueror, the wreath of the unfading olive of His eternal peace.

Besides the foot and chariot races, there were at Corinth, amongst other athletic sports, boxing and wrestling contests. The boxers or wrestlers took their places over against each other, clothed only around the loins, anointed all over with oil, more readily to elude each other's grasp. They narrowly scrutinized each other, to discover the weak points. When they began in earnest, blow followed blow, until the one knocked the other down, and placed his knee upon his breast.

Note how St. Paul applies the figure drawn from these contests. His body is the adversary of his spirit. He struggles with it. He curbs and stuns it, as with fist blows, until he gets the mastery of it. Its office is to be a ready ministering instrument of the spirit. The soul, with its new life, engages in a deadly battle against the old corrupt nature.

As St. Peter says, "Keep yourselves from carnal lusts which war against the soul," so St. Paul advises to deal plentifully fist blows and wounds to selfishness, to pride, to ambition, to sensuous enjoyment, to sloth, to excess of even legitimate desire. Rest not until you have gained the victory over your lower selves.

It is not done with one stroke; it requires preparation and continuous struggle. Assiduous practice gives the mastery. Thus it was at Corinth, where the racer and the ring-fighter, for years previously, put themselves in training, and qualified for victory by continence and exercise, of which St. Paul thus reminds you: "Every one who fights for the mastery is temperate or continent

in all things. Those so as to receive a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible."

A very suggestive story is told of Milo of Crotona. At one of those Grecian games he carried a huge fat ox upon his shoulders over the racecourse, amid the plaudits of the spectators. The wonder was how he had gained such strength. It was in this way. He began by carrying the ox when a calf every day. As it grew, his strength grew with it. Every successive day he experienced an increment of power, until, to the astonishment of all, he, at the end of two or three years, performed his great feat.

Note a beautiful and instructive application of this to yourselves! Carry patiently every day your little cross in following Jesus. The power will therefrom grow apace of bearing increasingly heavier crosses if need be and God wills it.

St. Paul, who appraises free grace and knows no righteousness but that of faith, here in herald tones calls to you: "Run!" "Wrestle!" "Divest yourselves of all impediments!" "Exercise yourselves daily in the fight that is ordained to you, with a view to the prize of your high calling!"

II.

As Corinth's similitudes stimulate, so Israel's retrogression warns.

God had done great things for the Jews. They obeyed Him when they became tired of the hard villainage and brick-baking in Egypt. They marched through the Red Sea, and were marked out as His elect people. They perceived His nearness in the cloudy or fiery pillar which went before them. They experienced His

graciousness in the manna from heaven and in the water from the rock. But during their wanderings in the desert many were smitten down. And why? Because whilst their feet went forward, their hearts turned backward to the sensuous pleasures and idolatries of Egypt. Then all wonders and deeds of God could not avail them. His good pleasure for so long could not rest on them.

St. Paul with his spiritually enlightened eye sees in their history a warning ensample to all future ages.

God has redeemed you, too, from the bondage of Egypt and the dominion of darkness. He has led you His people through the Red Sea of holy baptism. He has given you in the Lord's Supper manna from heaven, and drink from the Rock which is Christ.

But "he who lays his hand to the plough and looks back is not fit for the kingdom of God." Many have started and made some progress in the race for the prize, but the splendour of it has waxed pale, and they have become languid. Their struggle with the old corrupt nature has faltered. The pleasures of life, its riches, or honours have captivated them, and God's favour has withdrawn.

Many a one for a time has been changed for the better, but when God called you to a new work you proved too effeminate. Many a one of you has pressed through the Red Sea and given up the Egypt of worldly lust; but to run through the desert to the promised land was too much; for it you had not a mind.

Many a one has at one time given his assent to Christ, but when it came to the necessity of perfecting the Christian personality, he held back and forfeited the good pleasure of God.

Oh, beloved, do not forget, between the Red Sea and

Canaan lies the wilderness ; between holy baptism and blessed death a desert replete with fighting, temptation, tears and manifold privations ! but withal a desert full of manna, of effectual help, of the wonders of God, and of His good pleasure to those who fight manfully.

Do you ask, In whom then has God good pleasure ? Are we not altogether sinners and wanting in the glory which we should have from Him ? Answer : " The Lord has no pleasure in the strength of a horse, nor in any man's legs : but in those who fear Him, and put their trust in His mercy," who have hearty displeasure at themselves and truly repent them of their sins, finding their delight in Christ : who by the law have learned that they are poor and miserable, but by faith in Christ, realize that they have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sin.

To him who lives in the exercise of daily repentance and daily faith, the Father says daily, " Thou art my beloved child, in whom for the sake of Christ I am well pleased."

III.

Whilst Corinth's similitudes stimulate, and Israel's retrogression warns, mightier still purports the herald's cry—the heavenly crown beckons ! Not merely has life an end, but an aim.

You ask your children, What are you going to be when you leave school ? You ask the grown-up people also, What is your aim ?

A voice says, Ah, that I were happy, joyous and free of heart ! It is a general and painful lament. No one is properly happy upon earth. Under the sun all is utter vanity. Behold much misery and many tears !

It is the voice of the pilgrim choir, "We have here no abiding city, but we seek one to come." The home of souls is above in light, where there is no longer any sorrow, crying, or pain; where God wipes away all tears.

Not only freedom from earthly privations and distress! Oh no, the pilgrims know of a future glory. They sing in higher tones of the city with the golden streets and the gates of pearl, of the kingly crowns and priestly vestments, which await the conquerors.

But higher than all the other glory of the future world, is the rich pearl in the crown which beckons. The pearl of the soul is nothing less than God Himself. He is the true aim of life.

According to one of the Protestant confessions of faith, "Man's chief and highest aim is to glorify God, and fully to enjoy Him for ever."

God Himself says to Abraham, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."

If it be eternal life here to know the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, what will the face to face intuition be hereafter? You who know Him here by faith, will, after this life, have the full fruition of His glorious godhead.

A voice from the throne of the Almighty strikes the ear, "He who overcometh shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he will be My son for ever." Nothing less is the real aim of life.

The world also has its jewels. In Paris there is a great churchyard with countless marble monuments. In a remote corner is a wonderfully beautiful grave, in which the bones of a daughter of Israel rest. As a child she went through the streets of the city, and earned her livelihood by singing. The joyous child's

voice aroused surprise. Educated by benefactors she became the first artist on the stage, and in her tragical performances made the hearts of men to quake. As often as she stepped upon the platform, garlands of laurel and bunches of flowers were laid at her feet. She had what her heart desired. Then death knocked at her door. She lay upon her death-bed. The fever consumed her beauty and impaired her powers. None of her admirers, no female friend, no sympathetic heart, turned in to her lonely chamber. Only the Rabbi sat at her bedside and read the monotonous forms of Hebrew prayers, but she had no faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In the hour of death she asked for her pearls and jewels, seized them with trembling hands, groped amongst them with her fevered fingers, and said with faltering voice, "Oh, my jewels! Alas, that I must leave them!" Then she sank down in death, and people bore her forth to the grave in the corner of the large churchyard, unmourned and forgotten. Her own life had thus become a great tragedy.

Lift up your eyes. Another pearl beckons you. Your soul is athirst for God. The skirts of His garments are so beautiful and glorious, you long to be in His immediate presence. You sigh, When shall you see His face! At His passing shadow Moses was overpowered, bowed his head to the earth, and worshipped.

He is the Light which alone enlightens for ever; the Life which alone lives for ever and makes living; the Love which alone loves for ever, and of which all the sweetest love on earth is but the dimmest reflection.

Oh, then, when the hour of death comes, and friends kneel by your bedside, do not, like that daughter of Israel, grasp other pearls or precious stones, but hold

the one Pearl in the hand of faith, with joy at the near intuition of it. Say "Christ is your life, and death is your gain."

All else on earth is transient; but the One abides. Under the sun all is vanity, but above is God Himself, your portion for ever. The tired body will be borne to the churchyard where it will rest until it awake in His image; but the soul will be at home with the Lord; in the blessed company of the holy angels and of just men made perfect.

XXXVI.

Lent: Repentance and the First Fruits.

(FROM THE GERMAN OF CARL GEROK.)

REVELATION ii. 5.

WHEN distress in a house mounts to its highest, you open the last jewel-case, and remove the most costly jewel, in order to procure help. When, in war, all other weapons have been used up, you take from the arsenal the rarest pieces of armour, the most honoured banners, which you usually keep as relics, and with them advance into the field. Thus the Church, at this season of Lent, has, for the keenest battle with the misery of the time, for the supreme assault upon the heart and conscience, opened the most secret jewel-box of the Divine Word, and searched out rare weapons from the armoury of God. Not only the old prophets' sword is brought forth from the arsenal of Israel, and Isaiah's powerful voice, with its two-edged sharpness, which penetrates all hearts admonishingly and comfortingly. The most secret jewel-case of the New Testament is opened. From the Revelation of St. John, the book full of mysteries with seven seals, a word now majestically, like the sound of the trump of the world's judgment, penetrates your heart.

St. John writes by commission of the Eternal King,

who is and who was, and who is to come, seven circulars to so many Christian Churches in Asia Minor, and to their angels or bishops—circulars full of earnest warning and holy comfort, as is necessary in hard, oppressive times.

In the first of these seven circulars, that to the Church of Ephesus, it is said : “He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks, to wit, the seven Churches, ‘I know thy works, thy labour, and thy patience. But I have something against thee, that thou hast left thy first love. Think from what thou hast fallen, and repent, and do the first works. If not I will come to thee quickly and remove thy light from its place unless thou repent.’” These are the words before you. It is an honour to be privileged to appropriate words addressed to one of the most honoured Churches of antiquity. We would reverently take to heart the Voice from the upper sanctuary, which, in this Lent season, resounds in the Church of God.

Note (1) the kindly admonition ; (2) the earnest call to repentance ; and (3) the fearful threatening.

I.

First, the kindly admonition. “Think from what thou hast fallen.” Such is the purport of the faithful warning of the Lord to His ever-dear Church, even in its falling to ruins !

At Ephesus, one of the seven golden candlesticks was set up in the midst of the heathen world, and became the most distinguished Church in Eastern Christendom. St. Paul had founded it, and loved it

before all others, as his touching farewell to its presbyters at Miletus proves, as well as the glorious letter he wrote to it. St. John fostered it to the end of his days. It was privileged to harbour the darling disciple of Jesus long after the Lord came, at the destruction of Jerusalem, and to preserve in its bosom his honoured bones. Even in the circular letter of the Revelation, it still gets that praise from the mouth of the Lord, "I know thy works, thy labour, and thy patience." And yet there follows upon it the admonition, "Think from what thou hast fallen." Thy star is on the wane. It grows pale.

"Think from what thou hast fallen." Thy star is on the wane. Thus, beloved, the warning of the Lord is published to the Christendom of to-day, even to this congregation. You, too, perhaps, were once a more beautiful star in the right hand of the Lord, and had a noble reputation before God and men. Even in your bosom the eye of the all-knowing One may behold to-day still with satisfaction works of pious love, the labour of faithful servants, the patience and faith of the saints. And yet that your star is on the wane, you cannot longer hide from God, from the world, or from yourselves.

From what have you fallen? That your dear fatherland in temporals is no longer the blessed land it was formerly, as it was even twenty or thirty years ago; that the prosperity of the country has declined; that trade lies prostrate; that whole callings and conditions are scarcely able any longer to go on in consequence of overstocking, keen rivalry in the foreign market, or glut of foreign imports, or it may be bad year's crops, or other unpropitiousness of the time, even the blind can no longer deny. It is the general complaint. The hosts of emigrants prove it, who turn

their back on the land of their childhood, on the land of their fathers, often without a tear of sorrow.

Yet that is not what the Lord means. These are all wounds which may be healed. These are losses which may be compensated when the relations of the world are more favourably adjusted, when the gracious God sends from heaven blessed seasons. The true root of your fall lies deeper. The faithful word of warning refers you not only to the outer, but to the inner ruin of your land, the decay of morals, of religion, of Christianity. That from which you have fallen is faith, love to your Saviour and God. This moral and religious deterioration lies open to the light of day; every one sees it; every one laments it.

Wherein does this moral detriment consist? To begin with the more superficial appearance: A very walk upon the road, especially on the Sunday, shows you. Where is that simplicity of manners and contentment which once was the most beautiful ornament of our people? Behold now, in spite of evil times, luxury and pride every day take the upper hand, and one condition strives ever to outvie the other in pomp of dress, expense, and pursuit of pleasure.

Where is the activity and industry which once was the best capital even of the poor man, now, when thousands no longer wish to work, even when they may; when, next to the honest poor, so many shameless beggars go idle, or hunger, rather than put up with a moderate day's wages?

But in order the more closely to attack the evil, Where is the old chastity and honesty which once dwelt in your homes, now, when not only open and gross crimes so accumulate, that one is alarmed and shocked when he reckons up the amount of judicial proceedings

and penal sentences in a single year, but also when generally amongst thousands in high and low positions, maxims have become so loose, and vice and deterioration insinuate themselves into the hearts of so many houses in town and country, which still outwardly are held in esteem, and eat through home and heart like an evil fungus, or a noiselessly boring wood-worm?

In order to get at the bottom of the wound, Where is the old reverence for God's Word and Commandments, now that thousands of baptized Christians deride the Bible, Christianity, and religion as a childish fable; whilst parents preach to their children and children to their parents a wisdom which denies God, as was lately to be read in a letter of an emigrant son, who wrote from America for comfort to his poor old, ill father, "Above all, believe in no heaven or hell. Trouble yourself no longer about God or the devil. That is the chief matter?"

Yes, beloved, that is certainly the principal matter. That is the root of all evil, that godless, anti-Christian spirit, which has torn itself loose from the eternal ground of life, from God and Christ, the Rock of Salvation.

Even amongst those who would be and still are Christians, even in the congregation of the Lord, where is the first love? Where that inner, ardent, holy fervour to the Lord which once glowed through the primitive Christianity as a gentle fire, that even in the midst of the hardest renunciations could joyfully say with the apostle, "The love of Christ constraineth us"?

Where is that first love of our evangelic Church, that hunger after God's Word, that faithful confession which first, at the Reformation, actuated our godly ancestors to purge the Church from superstition amidst much

blood and toil—men through whom England became strong and honoured, and served far around as the salt of evangelic Christianity?

Oh! if to-day a man of God from the old godly times, I will not say an apostle, a St. Paul, or a St. John, oh no! If only one of the fathers of the Reformation again held a visitation of the Church in this country, what would he say of our half-hearted, feeble, lukewarm Christianity? What would he exclaim in this church, where his faithful testimony resounded nearly four hundred years ago? Oh! he would proclaim to us what the Lord himself proclaimed from the upper Sanctuary, "Think from what thou hast fallen."

We would not say, "Turn in everything back again for four hundred or for fifteen hundred years." We would not say, "Abolish your railroads. Relinquish the marvellous disclosures of electricity. Close the door to the more advanced arts and sciences. Bar from yourselves whatever else is good in the new time." That cannot be and should not be. But we call upon you not to forget, over what is new, the old, which never grows obsolete, because it is eternal. Think of your old virtue, of your old Godliness, and do not let yourselves be robbed of them, in order that people may not say, "How art thou fallen, beautiful star of the morning!"

Behold the first step to salvation! When the lost son, in his misery, remembered his father's house, when he came to himself and said, "How many servants has my father, who have fulness of bread, and I perish with hunger?" Then was the ice in his heart broken. Oh, beloved! You have gone away from your Father's house, where you were in plenty. You have wasted in riot a beautiful heritage of temporal and spiritual goods. You would now have had the fulness of bread if you had not

swerved from God. "Think from what you have fallen." Think again of your Father's house.

Is there here, in this church, at this Lent season, an erring soul, which once in better days, perhaps about Confirmation time, or it may be in his innocent childhood, has burned with the fire of love to the Lord, and this love has grown cold, and the soul has declined from the narrow way, and has conceived an affection for the world and for sin with the world, and has no longer any right peace or true joy? Oh! "think from what thou hast fallen."

Is there here an honest Christian heart which is in earnest with his Christianity, which would altogether belong to the Lord, and has often already made such vows, "There is in me, Lord, not a drop of blood which shall not do Thy will." But he has, in course of time, in the bustle of the world, relaxed, has become weary and lukewarm, and from a living Christianity of the heart, has declined into a dead Christianity of custom. Oh! let yourself be touched anew by the earnestness of this time. Be collected in your own better self. Bethink you of your holiest hours and most fervent vows. "Think from what you have fallen."

Is there here a frivolous heart, which has never yet seriously recognized his Christian calling, has never thought of his Christian covenant, which hitherto has lived to self, to the world and to sin? Oh! let yourself be reminded of the Lord, to whom you belong from your first breath. Think how St. Peter calls to you, "You are not redeemed with silver, or gold, or other transient things, from your vain conversation, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of an innocent, unspotted lamb." Think of thy baptismal covenant. Think of thy Saviour. "Think from what thou hast fallen."

II.

Listen to the voice: "Repent, and do the first works."

"Repent!" Yes, that is the necessary fruit when you think from whence you have fallen. "Repent!" Yes, so calls the distress of this time. So calls the earnestness of to-day. So calls the Lord Himself from the upper Sanctuary, to every one in the land, to the prince in the palace, as well as to the poor man in the cottage, to teachers and governors as well as to the common people.

"Repent!" That means, first of all, bow yourselves humbly with the confession of your sins before the holy and all-knowing God. Say, "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say to Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son." So to think, so to speak, so to act, means to repent. So repent to-day, O people of the Lord. Away with all pride and vanity, for He Who exhorts you to repentance is the supreme God, in presence of Whom worldly pomp, dignity and honour is worth nothing, before Whom the richest are as the poorest, the highest alike with the lowest are but dust and ashes. Away with all self-delusion and hypocrisy, for He Who calls you to repentance is the Searcher of Hearts, Whose flaming eye burns to the most hidden ground of your soul. Away with all self-righteousness, for He Who calls you to repentance is the thrice-holy and alone Good One, before Whom your best merits are miserable patch-work; you altogether are unprofitable. Away with all strife and brawl of factions, where every one puts the blame or guilt on the other—where one from the lower class rails at superiors, as if they did not

do their duty ; or one from the upper class chides the people, as if they complained without cause, or had drawn all grievances down upon themselves, or could fight their way through without help from above. In presence of the Lord, Who calls you to-day to repentance, no one is righteous, none of whom the confession of Daniel does not hold good, "To us belong shame and confusion of face." Yes, all Israel have transgressed. Repentance is the narrow gate, through which alone goes the way to salvation for single souls as for all peoples.

Nothing else can fundamentally avail. Publish the best laws and ordinances ! That is good, but it cannot heal the wound, if the lawgivers and people do not bow themselves before the holy Judge in heaven. Give the richest alms, and establish the most benevolent societies ! That is good, but it cannot help the people if they are not converted to the living God. Let thousands emigrate and seek their prosperity in a distant land ! That relieves from pressure, but those who emigrate cannot be holpen if sin mount behind them in the ship, and a curse step with them at disembarking. Neither does it avail those who remain at home, since the fever is too deeply seated in the marrow of the bones to be healed by mere blood-letting.

Let blessed seasons come and rich harvests, seven years of plenty upon the seven lean years ! We would upon our knees thank God for it, but that also cannot help us, if faithfulness and honesty do not flourish in the country, and the fruits of righteousness do not mature, if our people themselves do not become a good cornfield of God.

Should it then be so bitter, so difficult, so impossible, to follow this warning admonition from the upper

Sanctuary? Did not Nineveh once repent in sackcloth and ashes, from the king down to the beggar? Did not Ephesus repent at the warning of the Lord, so that for a hundred years longer it continued to blossom? If the Christianity of to-day cannot do more, may not, through our people, through our State, through our Church, a spirit of repentance at this season pass—a shudder of pious terror and of godly sorrow, so that you beat on your breasts, and bow yourselves humbly before the holy God, with the confession, “We have grievously done evil in Thy sight”? Oh! blessed were this season, if it were what is called a true Lent, or period of repentance for the country, yea, if to-day were a day of real penitence for single souls here and there, so that they threw themselves in the dust before the Lord, confessing their sins, and went away with the vow henceforth to sin no more.

Repentance, then, is not only humble prostration before God, but actual conversion to God. “Repent,” says the Lord, “and do the first works.” What are these first works? The works of the first love to God and to the brethren are those works of godliness, of brotherly love, of self-denial, which have been written down of the primitive Church, those works which, in the history of the apostles, you read of the first Christians of Jerusalem, “They remained steadfast in the Apostles’ doctrine, in breaking of bread, and in prayer. They sold their goods and possessions, and parted them amongst all according as every one had need. And they were daily and continually together with one accord in the temple, and did break bread from house to house. And the multitude of the faithful was of one heart and soul”—those works in the praise of which the Lord spake to the first Christians at Philadelphia in the

Revelation, "I know thy works; behold, I have set before thee an open door, and none can shut it, for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I will also keep thee in the hour of temptation." These first works learn again to do, O people of the Lord, which the first Christians did and were blessed in them—which your fathers did and found true happiness.

Do again the first works of godliness. Hold God's house in honour. Forsake not your assembling together, as the custom is with some. Hold God's table in honour, and come diligently to the altar of reconciliation as devout guests. Hold the Lord's day in honour as a holy day of rest, and desecrate it not by sinful pleasures or burden of work. Hold God's Word in honour as your family book, out of which you edify yourselves, and savingly impress your children. Hold prayer in honour, and be not ashamed to collect children and domestics around you for a pious morning and evening blessing, as your fathers did, whether they were clergy or laity, minister or handicraftsman.

Yes, Church of the Lord, hear the warning admonition from the upper Sanctuary, "Think from what thou hast fallen, and repent, and do the first works. If not I will come to thee quickly and remove thy candlestick out of its place."

III.

Listen to the fearful threat from the upper Sanctuary, "I will come to thee quickly." Thus the Lord threatens His apostate people. Ah! no gracious coming does He there intend, as you, in the meantime, have been

privileged to experience. No gracious Advent festival, when you made the Church jubilous with the song, "Zion, thy King cometh to thee, meek and lowly." No joyous Christmas festival, when the angels' message was proclaimed, "Fear not; I bring you tidings of great joy." No touching Passion-time, when He imploringly steps before you in martyr-form, and says, "Be ye reconciled to God." No delightful Easter greeting, when He appears amongst you with the comforting words, "Peace be with you." Also, no coming, as to-day, when He once again knocks at your heart with the ringing of the Lenten bells, "Give to Me, My child, thy heart." No coming in His saving word, no coming in His gracious sacraments, no coming in gentle whisper of His Holy Spirit! Oh no; a coming to judgment! "I will come unto thee quickly," means, so come as He came unto Jerusalem, in the horror of devastation, when the cry was uttered, "Ye mountains, fall on us; and ye hills, cover us"; so come, as He came to the rich usurer, and said, "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Thus, He may still so come to-day, come to a single soul, come to a whole people, and surely come soon.

Beloved, do you not often hear, in the storms of this time, the rushing sounds of His feet, and the foretokens of the last judgment, wars and rumours of wars, pestilence and dearth, earthquake and sedition, false prophets and deceivers of the people, the predominance of unrighteousness and the waxing cold of love? And if a whole people be not sure whether the Lord will not come soon with His judgments, oh, how much more certainly does it not hold good of every soul, "Behold, the Lord comes quickly!" How very soon may He not come to you in the awful earnestness of the hour of

death! How very soon for you may not another bell ring than the Lenten bells, to wit, the death-bell, and another call than "Repent!" sound in your ears, "Give an account of your stewardship!" Dear souls, should you not, so long as it is called to-day, consider what ministers to your peace, the fleetness of time and the value of life, the nearness of death and the earnestness of eternity? Should you not from to-day so live that you may not be alarmed when the Lord comes and His reward with Him, but with blessed hope and pious longing to His message, "I come quickly," answer, "Yea, come, Lord Jesus."

But woe if He come to judgment, as He threatened Ephesus. "I will come soon and remove thy lamp or candlestick from its place." What is this lamp? It is God's Word, a light to all your ways, your light even in dark times of tribulation as now, which, even through the night of death, gives you light into a blessed eternity. Woe where this light is removed out of its place! Woe to any one from whom the Lord has removed this lamp, and withdrawn the light of grace, because he has too long despised it. Woe to him if he now go astray in the night of tribulation, and have no Divine Word for a light in his dark ways. Woe to him if he now lie upon his death-bed, and there stand no lamp near his pillow, no gracious light of the Divine Word to illumine the gloomy death chamber, and clear up with its radiance the dark hours of death. Thrice woe, if it hold good of a whole people. The Lord will remove your candlestick out of its place. He will take away the light of the Divine truth, and give you up to the darkness of your hearts, because you do not repent.

At Ephesus it at last came to this. After a hundred years of patience, the candlestick was removed from its

place. There is no longer an Ephesus upon earth. There, where the city stood, which was once a wonder of the world, a block of marble rises up here and there, a cracked pillar stands out from the rubbish and bushes. There, whither a St. Paul wrote, "Praised be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus"—there, where St. John's voice was once heard, "Little children, love one another," the Turk now pastures his horse, and instead of the pure light of the Gospel there glimmers the pale crescent of Mohammed.

"I will remove thy lamp from its place." Woe if this threat, sooner or later, in tens or hundreds of years, go to its fulfilment in our dear native country; if the golden light of the Gospel, which for so many hundreds of years has had its place in our pulpits, at last should be taken away in punishment of our unthankfulness and disobedience! There are not wanting amongst you heathen hands to remove it, heathen feet to tread it down, any more than as once at Ephesus. There needs not the Turk to come. You have in the midst of you the enemies of the Cross of Christ, the enemies of the living God, who are ready to-day, if the Lord permit, to take away the light of the Gospel, and to set up the kingdom of darkness. Then, farewell fatherland, fortune, prosperity, culture, art, science, virtue, honour, peace and joy! Where the light of Christianity no longer shines it is all over with whatever breaks the night of barbarism. The history of the world testifies to it. Night was in the land before Christianity came. There will be again night when it is taken away. Then shout again, ye heathen, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" Then raise your goddesses upon the throne, Reason, and Nature, and Freedom, and howsoever else they may

be named. But consider what sort of light they give, whether they can compensate to humanity for the loss of Him Who of God is made to you wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption, Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, the Sun of spirits!

We would not, however, live to see it. May we not even lie dead in a land where the Cross of Christ no longer stands over our graves, much less live, suffer, and die without the gracious light of the gospel!

Keep us from it by Thy grace, O Thou great God and Saviour, who, full of faithful love, lookest down from the upper Sanctuary upon all the distresses of this time. Whatever judgments Thou hast reserved for us in the future, do not take away the precious deposit of evangelic truth, although we had merited it by our ingratitude and coldness; but preserve to us Thy Word, pure and unadulterated, together with Thy gracious sacraments, that our posterity may also inherit the blessings of Thy covenant, and the habitation of Thy name abide for ever and ever.

You people of God who have ears to hear, listen: "Hold what thou hast, that no one take thy crown."

XXXVII.

The Offences of the Age.

(FROM THE FRENCH OF BOURDALOUE.)

"Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me."

ST. MATTHEW xi. 6.

I.

BY this character the Saviour of the world recognizes His true disciples. He desires fervent, generous, sincere men, who make much of the honour of having Him as Master, and of the duty of obeying Him. Regard for man, so far as it is incompatible with unconditional loyalty to God is reprehensible.

First, regard to man, if not qualified by this higher reference, is a shameful slavery.

What can be more servile than to be reduced, or rather to reduce yourselves, to the necessity of regulating your religion and all your other conduct by the caprice of others, or by the vain judgment of the world?

St. Augustine used to deplore the condition of those ancient philosophers who by the exercise of reason recognized only the one God, but from the accommodation to the times did not forsake the worship of the many. Thus they appeared to adore what they really despised.

It is a question for you, whether from other human

regards you do not sometimes scorn and outrage that which is the true object of homage.

There are some things, St. Augustine adds, in which slavery is tolerable ; some others in which it is reasonable ; others in which it may be honourable. But to be submissive in a concern which is most essentially free, that is, the profession of faith and the practice of religion, is a thing which conscience cannot endure.

"Let us go into the desert," the Hebrews used to say to the Egyptians, for whilst we are amongst you we cannot freely sacrifice to the God of Israel. In all other respects we shall obey you, but in the worship of our God liberty is necessary for us. Such is the disposition which a true believer ought to cherish.

Slavery to human opinion is so much the more shameful, as it is the result of a littleness of mind and feebleness of heart, which you endeavour in vain to hide from yourselves. For if you had the greatness of soul which Christianity inspires, you should say, as St. Paul, "I am not ashamed of the gospel."

It should be your noble ambition to imitate the heroes of the faith who were bold to practise the duties of true religion in the teeth of prevalent idolatry and ungodliness. Daniel is a notable example.

The tradition has come down to us of one named Tobias, who lived in the northern kingdom of Israel after the schism of the monarchy. Whilst all others were running in crowds to the idols of Jeroboam, he, without fear of appearing singular, or of boasting of being in so good a cause, was going alone to the temple at Jerusalem.

Neither the number nor the quality of persons ought to move you. But, alas, you have often not enough courage to put yourselves above the world and its

censure. You let yourselves be disquieted. With what? With a word! And by whom? By vain men whose lightness and impiety is often well known.

Behold, a manifest chastisement of God who ordains, that in throwing off one yoke, you take upon yourselves another, it may be, a thousand times more humiliating and burdensome.

Mark in special the feature of laxity which attaches to this slavery of human respect or opinion.

It is a hateful laxity. You belong to God. You owe all to him. And yet you betray Him.

Bound by the most legitimate titles, formed by His hand, redeemed by His blood, heir of His glory, engaged by most solemn vows to serve Him, instead of arming yourselves with a holy boldness, and taking His cause in hand, you shamefully abandon it.

This is an unpardonable laxity. You cannot even bear it in those mercenary souls whose condition and need attach them to the service of others.

It is a laxity which is anathematized in the gospel. "Whosoever shall disavow Me before men," says the Son of God, "I shall disavow before My heavenly Father."

It is a laxity which even pagans have condemned in Christians. Recall to mind the wise Constantius, the father of Constantine the Great, who, though quite a pagan, retained near his person those officers and soldiers whom he found steadfast in the Christian faith, whilst he discharged the others who by a human fear had renounced or dissembled it.

Keep in memory so many martyrs, your brothers in Christ Jesus. Were they wont to fear the presence of man? Or was the God for whom they were willing to die more their God than yours?

But you need not go so far. Take the case of a

soldier remarkable for glory and military exploits. To have once hesitated or drawn back in peril, is what men would have regarded as an indelible stain. In exposing his life for sovereign and country he but acquits himself of a natural duty.

Why, then, in the things of God, should you, according to a figure in one of the Advent Gospels, be like a reed? Why not imitate St. John the Baptist? Even in chains he confessed Jesus Christ; even in the court of Herod he rendered testimony to Him.

Behold your pattern. If it be necessary to be a slave, it is a slave to God you are bound to, not a slave to the world. If you can free yourself from the world, the world, perverted as it is, will respect you. If, on the contrary, you continue servilely subject to it, the world itself will scorn you. But, in short, whatever the world may think of it, God is a sufficiently great Master to deserve that the world be sacrificed to Him.

II.

Turn your attention to some of the unhappy consequences of an undue regard for man's opinion.

1. It destroys in the heart the love of God; I mean the preference which is due to Him. For what is this human regard which detracts from God? Or, rather, why do you call it human regard, except that in a thousand instances it makes you respect the creature more than the Creator? That is what Tertullian used to reproach the heathen with, when he said, "You fear Cæsar more than Jupiter himself."

Thanks to God! You have a believing and good sovereign, but if the heavens had made you to be born

under the rule of a less religious prince, how many courtiers and others would have sought at the expense of God the favour of Cæsar!

2. To be the slave of human opinion makes you to fall into the most criminal apostasies. Call but to mind the acts of irreverence into which you have been betrayed in God's house.

Not to know the true God, whom you pretend to worship, is mere ignorance, but to slight or mock this the supreme object of adoration by hypocrisy or levity, to assist at His service as a hypocrite or a worldling is real apostasy.

You condemn those lax Christians who in persecution used to renounce Jesus Christ. They were apostates; but, after all, they were recoiling only from the violence of torment, in which, in some sort, they are the objects of your compassion. The question for you is no longer that of conquering either torments or death, but of overcoming a vain respect which you ought to be able so easily to surmount.

3. Respect for human opinion, when in excess, obstructs the influences and operations of the most powerful graces of God, and becomes a most fatal obstacle to the conversion of the worldling.

You feel in yourself some good dispositions, but a false fear of the world and its opinions makes all to vanish. You would wish the world to be more equitable, but however unjust it may be, you subject yourself to its law, or, to express it better, to its tyranny. Even up to death you see some men succumb to this idol of popular opinion, and to make of it a last pretext in excuse for neglect of all that religion prescribes to them.

Apprehend, then, the truth of the saying of Tertulian: "I am assured of my salvation if I am not at all

ashamed of my God." For if you be not ashamed of your God, you will not be ashamed of your duties ; and in following out your duties, in the teeth of the opinion of the world, you will attain salvation.

In conclusion, mark the anathema which Jesus Christ pronounced against the scandals that arise from conforming to the world, or complying with the prevalent vices, "Woe to the world because of offences." A woe is also pronounced on the unhappy instruments of them.

Such scandals are directly injurious to God, because they contribute to the decay of His worship.

Take an example. In what did the sins of the sons of Eli consist ? The Holy Spirit, in the inspired writings, marks it out to you in very strong terms. They were repelling those who came to offer sacrifices in the tabernacle at Shiloh. This was a capital sin, one too great to admit of pardon.

What else do the fast men of the present age, many of them it may be in positions of influence ? By railing at piety and by subtle sophistry, as well as by practical neglect and scorn, they contribute as much as lies in them to the overthrow of religion.

With what severity God punished the scandal in the persons of Hophni and Phineas, with the same He will avenge the profligates of this age, since the matter in question is the most essential of all. If any in a state undertake by arguments or solicitations to corrupt the loyalty of a people or its faith in God, there is no punishment of which they are not worthy.

This propagandism of error is a most contagious scandal, most ready to communicate itself. What progress has it not made ? If not arrested, what havoc will it not bring about ?

The apprehension of this circumstance moved the

valorous Matathias. It prompted him to an action of which the memory is likely to be eternal. He saw an Israelite overcome by fear of the world on the point of worshipping the idol, or the so-called abomination of desolation which Antiochus Epiphanes had caused to be set up in the most holy place of the temple at Jerusalem. Touched by holy wrath or zeal for God, he prevented this impiety by a double sacrifice, immolating on the very altar of the idol not only the impious Israelite, but the pagan priest who was presiding at the ceremony. He rightly apprehended that the bad example of a single person might shake the fidelity of a whole nation.

From such considerations there springs for the great of the world, indeed for all persons who possess any influence, the most binding obligation of being not only sincere but exemplary in the worship of God and in the exercise of their religion.

Oh, be sure that your good example is the best preservative against the libertinism of the age.

XXXVIII.

“The Way, the Truth, and the Life.”

(FROM THE FRENCH OF VINET.)

“Jesus saith I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by Me.”

ST. JOHN xiv. 6.

“CHRIST in us” is one aspect of religion, “Christ for us” another. Of whatever part of religion we speak, the name of Christ suggests itself. Christ is the kernel of religion.

I.

What is religion? The answer of philosophers and of the vulgar is here at one. Religion is an instruction, a doctrine, a system of the essential relations of God to man.

The Christian religion is the instruction, the doctrine, the system of Jesus Christ, just as Mahomedanism is the system of Mahomet. There is no other definition more generally accepted.

Religion, to be sure, necessarily implies instruction. A religion which does not instruct is not worthy of the name. By instruction here is understood the communication of truths regarding the relation of God to man. True religion, however, cannot be merely an instruction, and does not begin with it.

II.

You must place yourselves in the one or the other of these two predicaments, between which there cannot be a third. Either man is fallen or he is not.

If man were not fallen, but continued in the condition in which God at first placed him, an instruction would not have been necessary. In such a case you would be inwardly taught by the voice of nature. Your religion were, then, in the realist sense, natural religion; but it would differ from that which ordinarily now goes by that name, in that the latter is an inference of the reason, whilst the other is an immediate intuition, of the truth of God, an infallible perception of a special sense, yet unimpaired and in its prime vigour.

If you were not fallen, you would thoroughly know your relations to God without any instruction, exclusive and independent altogether of the gospel. The saying would be real: "None should teach his neighbour, and none his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all should know Him, from the least to the greatest." Your attitude to God were, then, perfectly plain. You had something better and surer than intellectual inference and concepts—I mean an inner intuition and sentiment. You had felt the reality of it as you do that of your own existence. You had not been more certain of yourself than of the nature and the will or the personality of God, which is the main object of religion.

If you be not fallen, you are in God, and God in you; and in this intimate communion you enjoy the bliss of His presence. In this immediate fellowship the first man lived in paradise. He had not to seek after God, because he possessed Him already. He had not to go out of himself, since he enjoyed inward, uninterrupted

communion with Him. There had been no need of religion in the present current sense of the word, of which expiation or atonement is the central idea. If, on the contrary, you have fallen, a half-fall in this case is out of the question. The effect of such a fall is like to that of a branch detached from a tree. The branch dies, because it is separated from the source of its life. For a few days, perhaps, it may preserve some appearance of vitality, but it is virtually dead, and will soon be so actually.

Man, with all his manifold diversity of temperament and individuality, does not by halves separate himself from God. There are, to be sure, degrees of evil, but between the good and the evil, whatever may be the degree, there is an abyss. Fallen man has not merely turned aside from the straight course; he has plunged over head and ears in sin and guilt. He is not only languishing; he is dead. His fall is in Holy Scripture described by the word "death." "You were dead in trespasses and sins." It may not be called by any term more reassuring, even on ground outside revelation.

But if your fall be so, if it resemble the cutting-off of a branch which dies, if it be a death, what purpose should it serve to know the essential and true relation of God with man, arising out of the essential nature of both? Of what avail, if religion had no other and higher aim? Besides, how should it succeed?

Your intellectual light is impaired. It can shed on this important subject only vague and uncertain glimmers. You may doubtless obtain some sort of speculative knowledge, sufficient to feel saddened, but it would, after all, be an idle speculation—not something objective as well as subjective—a reality without you as well as in you—a really new condition of religious life. Religion

must be more than an instruction. On the supposition of the fall, a fact of redemption is necessary.

III.

The question is of an act of God. Man may not compass or even imagine the precise fact needed. If you could remedy your fall and raise yourselves to your primitive integrity, you would not be really fallen.

The outer reformation of man is nothing to the purpose. The inner renewal, which is everything, is an act of God. In order to it, God must descend and enter into time and history. He must, in a real sense, take your place. So all positive religions have surmised, and, in doing so, proved themselves more philosophic than philosophy itself.

In what does this fact consist? In a Divine word? Does God enter into time merely to declare what He is and what He wills? Oh no! He comes into the world to act. Action is the most effectual manner of manifestation. There is in the Divine deed more than an echo, a word, a revelation; there is a real being—the substantial and personal communication of God. Behold the nature of the redemption, to the idea of which you have been led.

Now, note, though all religion convey instruction, true religion must do something more. There are, then, the two ways in which God may teach the sinner: either by punishing or pardoning. If He do neither the one nor the other, what else can He do?

Pardon is His method. It must be so, for to punish the sinner were to destroy. If the fall be a death, Divine punishment is a destruction. But in such punishment there can be no instruction. To destroy is

not to instruct. The psalmist says, "Shall the dust praise Thee? Shall it declare Thy truth?" Isaiah also says, "The grave cannot praise Thee. Death cannot celebrate Thee. They who go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. The living alone shall praise Thee, as I do this day."

It is therefore necessary that God remit punishment and vouchsafe pardon. "His grace bringing salvation is manifested to all men, and teaches that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, you should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present evil world." Behold a grace which instructs! The Word of God can alone speak thus.

The grace which teaches true godliness is alone replete with real instruction. Fix permanently in your minds God's purpose and method. It is, first of all, "to create in you a clean heart, and renew a right spirit." Pardon touches you in the very core of your personality, lays you open to the reception of the truth, transforms your inner being with all its outward issues.

IV.

The gospel appeals to your sense of justice as well as love.

Ask yourselves, Can God pardon purely and simply? Can He say to you that He regards the evil you have done as not done and void?—that He forgets it utterly?—that your relation to Him is the same after the sin as before? Beloved, there is more in real pardon than a word, an expression of God's good pleasure, more even than the abolition of a debt. Such is only the negative element of it. There is the positive as well—the

atonement, the sacrifice, the gift. In pardoning, God gives Himself.

If man pardon, he renounces some satisfaction or other—the gratification of selfishness in one shape or other. He might, like Shylock, for example, or the unmerciful servant in the gospel, claim the detestable pleasure of extortion or retaliation; but if he do not, there is sacrifice on his part.

Human analogies are, however, inadequate. When man pardons, it is his duty, since all alike need forgiveness at the hand of God. But sin cannot be regarded as a mere personal and private injury, but an infinite wrong—a violation of eternal right—an infraction of the law and order of the universe, which demands expiation, and for which God alone can provide a remedy out of the resources of infinite love. He sacrifices Himself, and in so doing vindicates His eternal and immutable justice. Without the atonement He provided, there is and can be no remission.

Consider this fact of justice, how deeply seated it is in human nature. Man cannot really believe in the pardon of sin without some such pledge from God. This may be understood from the fact that he is implacable to himself. When he reckons with himself there is no creditor more pitiless. He may be a long time without making this reckoning, the while “drinking iniquity like water.” When at last his conscience awakes, and he knows how much he is in arrears with God, he cannot forgive himself. He feels that he cannot atone for his great guilt. God’s forgiveness and vindication of eternal justice is necessary to the satisfaction of his conscience and repose of spirit.

An instinctive, profound sense may give a dawning assurance that God has provided against the awful

consequences of the fall, but the portentous facts of sin and guilt stare you in the face, and scare away the free offers of the grace of the gospel. The objection ever recurs: What, no account of the sins you have done and their apparently irreparable guilt! Is it possible that in any real sense you can now be in the same position as if you had been always righteous? Behold, in the midst of your fears and distrust a voice from the hoar past, full of Divinest consolation, falls on your ear: "Though your sins be as scarlet they shall be as white as snow: though they be red like crimson they shall be as wool."

To overcome incredulity and the despair of conscience some Divine pledge is necessary—a palpable testimony of the gracious purposes of God. Jesus Christ sacrificing Himself for sin, in demonstration of infinite holiness and love, is the sufficient pledge, the irrefragible testimony you need.

Whilst infinite justice claims your reverence, infinite love alone conquers your heart. That God's love is boundless is proved historically by His descending in the person of His eternal Son to the last depths of human misery. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us." Behold the revelation of God's glory in the only begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, full of grace and truth, your Representative and Surety—the head of a regenerate humanity! Such is the kernel truth of all religion worthy of the name.

Other religions blindly render homage to this principle. The idea of incarnation is found everywhere. Cicero says, "Men have transferred what is human to the gods. The rather let us transfer Divine things to men." This view of a heathen has met its fulfilment in the gospel.

A fact, a person, a new creation is the manner in which religion is presented to you. A fact, historical and personal, is the foundation of all its teaching. Jesus Christ does not merely say, "I show the way, I teach the truth, I communicate the life," but "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

Be sure, beloved, never to put your Christianity in the place of Christ. To be a Christian is to belong to Him, to live in Him, to have fellowship with Him. It may seem singular to say so, but it is needful.

The mistake into which some fall in this respect may be compared to the foolish conduct of a man exposed to an extreme danger, to whom you give information that a generous offer to rescue him has been made. There is no obstacle to betaking himself to his benefactor. He may directly see, hear, and obtain without delay the realization of the kind offer.

But no! he keeps himself at a distance, and prefers to go afar off for information. The important thing appears to him to know the name, the history, the titles of the friend who wishes to save him, whilst the simplest and most pressing thing all the while is to enter into the neighbouring room, where he is, and to return thanks to him.

Oh, that you would hasten to enter the door of grace, for you can receive nothing from the hand of your benefactor except you put yourself in direct communication with Him.

Infinitely above all history, above all doctrinal systems, above Christianity itself, exalt Christ Himself in His loving and holy personality, and do not limit yourselves to an acquaintance with the doctrine or the science that relates to Him, however important in its own way that may be.

XXXIX.

The Message of Life of Easter Morn.

(SUGGESTED BY THE GERMAN OF CARL GEROK.)

"Be not affrighted : ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified : He is risen ; He is not here : behold the place where they laid Him."

ST. MARK xvi. 6.

YOU were last gathered together at a festival of death. Devoutly to contemplate the dying of the greatest of the dead, and to draw from it admonition, comfort, and blessing was your task on Good Friday.

To-day it is said, "Sing to the Lord a new song." "I live and ye shall live also." Thus the Risen One speaks to His disciples. Jesus lives, you also with Him. Thus Christendom sings around the empty grave. You hear on Easter morn a message of life. You celebrate to-day a festival of life.

Every morn, as it drives away the shades of night, awakens the world to new life, replenishes the exhausted with new powers, inspires the afflicted with new courage, according to the words of Scripture, "Weeping endureth for the night, but joy cometh in the morning."

Spring succeeding winter brings fresh life into the creation, and together with the quickening of the stiffened and numb nature, awakens the desponding human heart to renewed faith and hope. The poet

sings, "The mild breezes rustle and stir everywhere by day and night doing their genial work. Oh, the fresh fragrance! Oh, the sweet tunes of birds! Take courage poor heart. A brighter hope beckons onward."

But such a transformation of all things, such an enlivening spring, such a bright morning light, such a breath of life, no sunrise and no beginning of spring has brought to the world, since summer and winter, day and night succeeded each other on earth, as that Easter morn of which the Gospel before you speaks. May it to-day diffuse its joyous splendour in your hearts!

The message of life of Easter morn signifies: (1) your God lives; (2) your Saviour lives; (3) your dead live; and (4) you shall also live.

I.

Your God lives! is the first message of Easter morn to you as to those mourning women, who with bowed head and oppressed heart, wended their way to the grave of the Crucified.

"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" This cry of deepest grief from Golgotha still re-echoed terribly in their souls. If He, their adored Lord and Master, felt Himself forsaken by His God, in the dark hour of death, how should they, His weak female disciples, still hope upon God, and comfort themselves in His nearness?

"Where is now thy God?" Thus might the enemies of the new faith triumphantly ask, Where the God, whose Son this Jesus claimed to be; the God whom He bade you to invoke as a Father, and to pray for the coming of His kingdom?

Where is now your God? Thus querulously might

your own souls ask? Where His love, if He forget His elect ones, who trust in Him? Where His faithfulness when His promises anew fall through, which you at last believed to have been fulfilled? Where His righteousness when the wicked triumph? Where His almightiness when His enemies retain the victory? Harder than the stone before the door of the grave, doubt in God oppressed their souls. But now this stone must fall from their hearts by the Easter message of the angel. Now their faith must revive by the splendour of the Easter sun.

"Christ is risen!" means, God is living as of old. "The right hand of the Lord is exalted. The right hand of the Lord bringeth mighty things to pass. The right hand of the Lord maintains the victory." "I have forsaken thee for a short moment, but with great mercy I will gather thee. I have in wrath for a little hid my face from thee, but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer."

God is living as of old. This Easter comfort you need anew to take home with you from the grave of the Risen One. So often as times come in the history of humanity, in the unfolding of the kingdom of God, in the leading of your own life, when the living God appears to hide His countenance and withdraw His hand, there ever again comes a day when it is manifested. The Lord is not now and never is parted from His followers.

If a gloomy intuition of the world take possession of mind and heart, and you no longer discern around you and above you the living God, but see in the universe only the blind rule of an impersonal nature with its undeviating laws and rigid forces, and in the intricate machinery of human history an all-controlling fate

shaping casually the destinies of men, you should at the grave of the Risen One comfort yourselves in the joyous belief, there is a personal God. A holier will is present in all the changes of the world, in the fitful fortunes of human life. Whatever appearances may be to the contrary, God sits on the throne of government and does all well.

If under the burden of a hard stone of care, under pressure of bitter experiences, courage gives way, and faith is weakened, think of the hard course of those troubled female disciples, how their sorrow is at last changed to joy. Take the joyous Easter morn following upon the darkness of Good Friday for pledge that "The Lord forsakes not those who trust in Him." Poor heart, be not anxious. To-day tells you God is living. And—

II.

Your Saviour lives. Not only a good man, a dear friend, a revered Master, did the female disciples bewail in the Crucified and Risen One. Oh no! He had become vastly more to them. They had lost in Him a Saviour; Him of whom the two disciples on the way to Emmaus so touchingly testified, "We hoped He should have redeemed Israel."

Yes, they had hoped so much. Now their hope had deceived them. Himself had been deceived, had promised more than He could perform. He lay in His bloody grave clothes, certainly not as a blasphemer of God and a deceiver, as His enemies accused Him, but still as a deluded enthusiast, who had the will to help His people but not the power. They were indeed bent on showing the last honour to His corpse, by anointing

it with spices and keeping it from corruption. Well might they carry His image in loving memory, and fondly cherish many of His words never-to-be-forgotten, but the old splendour had vanished, the Divine power of His sayings had been lost. Their recollections of Him were painfully disconcerted. A noble martyr indeed, but not the one for whom they had taken Him, for whom He had held Himself, the Messiah of God, the Saviour of His people!

When now they heard, "The Crucified is risen!" step by step they learned to comprehend it. In how quite different a light did His person appear to them! Him, the Almighty God, justified signally before all the world; His words vindicated in the teeth of the unbelief of His enemies, and in reproof of the little faith of His friends! Now they had their Saviour again, all which they hoped for, more than they had believed. The troubled Mary could fall at His feet with the joyous call, "Rabboni." The doubting Thomas could put his fingers in the nail prints, with the adoring confession, "My Lord, and my God!"

You also, beloved, are privileged to chime in this confession, for the Easter festival calls to you, "Your Saviour lives!" If you had no Easter message, if the concluding word of the history of the sufferings, "They sealed the stone," were the concluding word of the whole Gospel, the most beautiful hope of humanity would lie buried under that stone. The hope of redemption from sin and reconciliation with God were at an end.

A wise teacher, an excellent friend of man, a godly sufferer, a martyr worthy of tears, you should have had in Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified, but no Saviour who had broken the bann that lay on humanity, who has

reconciled you to God, and redeemed you from sin and death.

But Jesus Christ is risen! That means, He has been justified by God as His dear Son, and as the Saviour of the world.

Your Saviour lives! That means His word is not a human word pervaded with error, but an undeceptive imperishable word of God. His death is not only a touching martyr's death, but an atoning sacrifice. His person not a transient appearance in the history of humanity, but the living Head of His Church.

Your Saviour lives! That means He continues to live not only in the thankful memory of His own people, but personally as a Victor over death and the grave, to whom you need to pray, even if you do not see Him, who is with you every day until the end of the world, who imparts the blessing of His resurrection to you in life and in death. Therefore you rejoice to-day also at the message.

III.

Your dead live. "Who rolls for us the stone from the grave of the sepulchre?" Thus the sorrowing women ask one another on their anxious way. To-day a thousandfold sorrowing love puts a similar question?

Who will restore to us our dear ones departed, and heal the wounds which their loss has caused? If you give up the hope that the grave will surrender its booty, and resign yourselves to go along lonely upon earth, who will lift up the mysterious veil of the unseen world which hides them from you? Who will inform you of the lot of your sleeping ones? Who will console you amidst the havoc of corruption? Who protect you

from the comfortless thought of annihilation of your beloved ?

Human comfort does not reach far. You may go forth to a quiet grave, may piously deposit a wreath or garland on it, may plant fragrant flowers there, or pluck a flower off it, and take it home for a memento.

You may honour your dead, and as it were embalm them, cherishing their image in your heart, and keeping it ever alive in your consciousness.

You may bespeak a grave close to theirs, and rejoice that on a future day you will rest near them.

But the stone is by that not rolled away. The darkness is not lighted up. The melancholy gloom is not dissipated. Gone, and dead ! You can reach no further with your human knowledge.

Hallelujah ! "Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that sleep." With His gravestone rolled away, the earth has to your sleeping ones become lighted up. With the Easter message of the angel, "He whom you seek is risen, and is not here," you are admonished at the grave of dear ones. Seek them not under the earth, which only hides their grave clothes, and preserves their stripped-off pilgrim robe, but seek them above the earth, whither Christ the Risen One has gone before, to prepare a place for His own people.

Your dead ones shall live, live through Him and in Him, who has taken its sting from death, and its victory from the grave. Oh, may this Easter message full of comfort to-day cast a beam of joy in your midst, in every troubled heart, in every orphaned home, on every grave growing freshly green in the spring sun, so that you mourn not as those who have no hope, but look upward from the grave with the confidence—Oh no ! Nothing

truly human decays. Even that part of you which dies, the body, shall rise. Transfigured to heavenly splendour, it shall go forth from the grave.

To be sure, such hopes of life you only can conceive and appropriate, who already carry in yourself something of the life of Christ. The Easter festival therefore brings home the truth to your hearts.

IV.

You shall also live. Not first on the other side of the grave, but here on earth you shall live; shall not merely at the last day rise up, but shall now spiritually rise, whilst you let your sins be buried, and walk with Christ in newness of life. Such is the Easter spiritual awakening to each of you.

To those women on the first Easter morn came an awakening call. The angel said, "Go hence, and tell His other disciples and Peter that the Saviour goeth before you into Galilee. There you shall see Him as He said unto you."

That means, rise out of your deep sorrow. Shake off doubts and fears, you timid and trembling souls. Gather yourselves together, you scattered and dispersed sheep, around your Good Shepherd, and be strengthened and confirmed in faith. Be united in hearty love, and hold together against the hostile world. Then go forth, and bring to all races of men a new life, through the message of Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen One.

Such was the awakening call of the Easter festival to the first disciples. To you also to-day the call is published, "Jesus lives, and ye shall live also," shall live already in Him and for Him here on earth.

Yes, beloved, if you have not in vain stood by Jesus'

cross and grave, if of all that is earnest and comforting, which this festival, rich in grace, has declared to you, something remains fixed in your hearts, if you have received good impressions from the Divine Person of the Crucified and Risen One, oh, go not away again as you came. Remain not distant from the Lord and His communion. Follow Him and learn ever to know Him better, and be increasingly awakened to a new life. Then replenished by His life, go hence to work for Him, and rejoice in His life of service. To you who know that your God and Saviour lives, who carry in yourself a spark of the divine life, the earth is no longer a vale of sorrow. You can live joyously, and work courageously, and endure patiently, and exult in prospect of the heavenly Easter, when the Risen One will fulfil in its plenitude the promise, "I live, and ye shall live also."

XL.

The Church of the Lord in its Spring Adornment.

(SUGGESTED BY THE GERMAN OF FRIEDRICH AHLFELD.)

"If a man love Me, he will keep my words : and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him and make Our abode with him."

ST. JOHN xiv. 23.

NATURE now unfolding its summer pomp is designed by God for a twofold end. The first is to give nourishment and delight to man in his pilgrimage, the field for food, the garden for recreation. The second, to be an allegory in field and forest, mountain, river, and ocean. Happy they who have an eye so to read and understand it!

The Lord is conspicuous above all in reading nature. His parables are spiritual interpretations of it.

You are now in the spiritual spring, but it does not alone come at Whitsuntide. Oh no, at all other times, in the midst of the coldest winter, and in the hottest summer. Who causes it? What breath awakens it? The Spirit of God alone.

If so charmingly out of doors with sunshine, mild winds, and genial rains, summer comes on apace and all plants shoot forth and blossom, the lambs bleat, and the birds sing, how infinitely more beautiful is the spiritual

spring in the field and garden of God, to wit, the Church!

Consider the community of the Lord in its spring adornment.

(1) It loves Him, and keeps His word; (2) the Father and the Son make abode in it; (3) it is blessed in the peace of God.

I.

Now that the Lord had returned into the glory which He had before the world was, the disciples could survey the whole work of salvation. His entire humiliation and exaltation now lay before them; humiliation in the deepest ignominy and in nameless suffering; exaltation into the highest glory and bliss, which no heart can imagine or mouth express. Over every step of His great course you may read "for you," from love for you.

What other inscription on the cradle of Bethlehem than "for you"! His entire preaching, every one of His words and works, was essentially love "for you."

Under the superscription on the Cross there is discernible to the eye of faith "for you." In yourselves no righteousness, in Him perfect redemption.

A monumental inscription fit for His tomb would be "for you." At His Resurrection and Ascension it can only be said "for you."

Whether His name was glorious amongst men, or at other times when they spat upon Him and reviled Him, He alike suffered and struggled "for you."

What does He desire in return? Love first of all, then obedience. You who love Him will keep His word.

Where may a true friend bestow this love if not on Him? If you regard His person, He is the most lovely of all who have walked on earth. If you regard His work, it is from the first to the last breath one of love. Yes, "love Him, for He has first loved you."

As the earth warmed by the sun causes all plants to grow, so from the heart, penetrated by the love of God, all good works and Christian virtues spring and flourish.

The apostles were devotedly attached to the Lord, who for three years had opened to them His heart. The quiet days after the Ascension they, in thought, lived the blessed time over again.

If you wonder how the four Evangelists harmonize in so many places almost word for word, you need only transport yourselves into the circle of witnesses, who knew no greater joy than ever afresh to recall to mind the day of grace with its words and works. The same form of narrative and expression thus became indelibly impressed on each one's testimony.

They remained at Jerusalem in the unity of the Spirit which the Lord implored for them in His high-priestly prayer, and awaited the promise of the Comforter, who in due course came to them. Then they experienced the first Whitsuntide.

II.

His indwelling. At the first creation God's Spirit found a place in men's hearts. After the fall, they would no longer let His Spirit rule in them. How far this deterioration may go you see in heathen peoples, as well as in a lapsed Christendom.

To the question, What difference is there between

man and beast? an African chief answered, Nothing more than that man is the more prudent and wicked.

The eternal love gave the law, and awakened the longing for salvation. The promise spread like a lovely dawn over two thousand years. God spake by the prophet Joel, "It will come to pass in those days, I shall pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters will prophesy."

The fulfilment happened after the Mediator accomplished the Atonement, the reconciliation between God and man.

Whitsunday became the new life day of our race, its true spring, its most beautiful day of joy. The Holy Ghost once more returned in unrestrained fulness to redeemed humanity.

The disciples were gathered together in unity of heart and prayer. From heaven of a sudden there arose the sound of a mighty rushing wind and filled the whole house. Cloven tongues as it were of fire sat upon each of them. They were filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak in diverse tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

Thus a new thing happened. No longer unenlightened Galileans looked for an earthly kingdom and the places of honour in it. No longer, as in the night of the Lord's battle, did they fear for their own lives.

Another lived and ruled in them. Another spoke by them. Not they lived: Christ lived in them. Not they spake: the Spirit of the Father spake by them. This Spirit abides in the Church to-day. He is poured forth from it, and is communicated from one nation to another, from one age to another, till the end of time. He will never withdraw till He has prepared the last believer for eternal glory.

Wherever He comes, there is something of the glory of the first Whitsuntide, even though it be not marked by a mighty rushing wind and fiery tongues. There the Church is built up. There it is filled with the powers of eternal life. In the tabernacle of God amongst men all are of one heart and soul.

If you rejoice when an illustrious man enters your house and spends a day, or even a few hours, with you, how much greater must be your joy when the holy Almighty God condescends to enter into your homes and hearts !

III.

The Holy Ghost blesses you with the peace of God. How often does the Lord and His apostles speak of this peace ! St. Paul thus greets the Churches of his day : " Grace and peace be with you from God the Father and from His Son Jesus Christ." He speaks of the peace of God which is above all understanding.

Our Lord discriminates His peace from all other peace. " Peace I leave with you. My peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth. . . . Let not your heart be troubled."

The world's peace stands upon hollow ground. Think of that between states and peoples. In the very moment they conclude it, and are subscribing its conditions, the thought of vengeance and of new war lurks in their heart.

Not even amongst those whom God has most closely joined together, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers, sisters, and friends, is there a lasting security of peace. Only the peace which the Lord gives is entire, deep, and strong.

Behold the crown of salvation! "Justified by faith you have peace with God."

The whole world is no equivalent for this peace. All the treasures and honours of earth heaped together will not give it to you, will not counterbalance that one word of Jesus, "Peace be with you."

Thus the peace of God reaches down into the heart, diffuses itself far and wide to the very ends of the world, and extends to the distant future, to death and judgment.

Consider the first Christian community, mixed up of divers sorts, rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, amongst whom a wonderful unity ruled. Like one great family, the members rejoiced in one another. The one bore the other's burdens. When one stumbled, all seized his hand. When one was persecuted, all contributed to lighten his sufferings; if they could not otherwise, yet by faithful prayer and intercession. The world thus recognized that they were Christ's disciples. The heathen exclaimed, "See how these Christians love one another."

Amidst persecution and martyrdom, the Church, an army without sword or spear, with the weapons of the Word and of love to Christ, conquered the world.

Does it not, then, make you sad, when you compare your coldness and shortcomings, your divisions and schisms, with the unanimity of that early Church? Do you not long for a return of that spring time, though it be with abated splendour? You cannot be well without it.

Who, then, can bring it back? Man's art and power are in vain. Ordinances and institutions will not. Forms and props serve indeed to preserve life; they can never make or give it. All props and fences upon which vines and other fruit trees are trained can never make

a spring, can never cause a single blade or flower to shoot forth.

God alone can do it with His genial rain, mild winds, and sunshine. In the spiritual field and garden, the Holy Spirit alone can do it.

Read diligently the Word of God. Commune frequently with Him in prayer. Have your heart and will made new in Christ Jesus. Receive all needful help and grace out of His fulness. So shall your house and Church blossom in all the gay adornment of spring, and will become a beautiful domain in which God and the good angels will rejoice and expatiate. Pray for such grace of Whitsuntide for your national Zion.

XLI.

The Net in the Sea.

(SUGGESTED BY THE GERMAN OF CHR. ERNST. LULHARDT.)

ST. MATTHEW xiii. 47-50.

THE Church year is drawing toward its close. The end of it is suggestive of the end of all things; of sin, death, and judgment, those three dark powers of earthly life to which the Advent message of salvation in Christ gives the blessed answer.

Seven parables of the heavenly kingdom follow upon one another in this part of the Gospel: the Sower, the Wheat and the Tares, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Treasure, the Pearl, and the Fish-net. They all shadow forth the new blessed order of things which Christ introduced. The Kingdom of God, founded on His word, on earth a mixed community from a small beginning, extending over the whole world, its power penetrating and renewing all, hidden from men's eyes though of absolute worth, for which you should be willing to give up all: at last, when the time of calling and gathering is over, the separation and the judgment. Of these seven, that of the fish-net presents you with three pictures in succession:—

(1) The Net in the Sea: or the Calling; (2) the Fish in the Net: or the Gathering; (3) the Net on the Land: or the Separation.

I.

The gathering. The kingdom of heaven is like a net which is cast into the sea, and which gathers of every kind.

The sea is the world of peoples. The nations are oft in Scripture likened unto a sea, heaving, restless, stormy. Like waves, they spread over the earth. As of the actual sea, so of this sea of peoples; it may be said that it swells and roars, so that those who dwell at the ends of it are removed; but of God it is said, "He stilleth the roaring of the sea, the raging of its waves, and the madness of its people."

The Gospel Net, then, is cast into this great sea of nations. "Go forth and teach all peoples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," is the commission of the Lord to His disciples, through whom His call goes over the world. "To Me," He says, "all power is given in heaven and on earth." "All kingdoms of the world shall become the kingdom of the Christ of God."

You have perhaps stood by the sea and seen the little boat launch out into the deep, and draw after it the net to catch whatever creatures come in its way. Thus the Church goes forth through all times and throws out its net. One people after the other in succession come into it. For to Christ the nations are for booty, and the rich for spoil.

At Whit Sunday the Apostles began their fishers' work in Israel. "To catch men" was their vocation. At their call thousands indeed entered the Church, though the Jewish nation as a whole refused, and up till to-day they remain outside. The Gentiles, on the other hand, flocked into it. St. Paul, in special, steered

the ship into the great sea of heathendom, and cast the net far and wide amongst Greeks and Romans, and beyond. And when their time of prosperity and sovereignty was over, the decrepit and tottering empire was inundated by a mighty migration of Goths and Huns, Vandals and Tartars, from the central table land of Asia. Peoples upon peoples rolled on like a surging sea, until the waves gradually subsided, and the new formation of nations settled upon the wrecks of the olden civilizations. Thus the Gospel threw its net once more into this great seething, overflowing flood of barbarians, both Germanic and Tartar. Our Angle, Saxon, and Jute forefathers, too, were caught in it. Thus you, their descendants, have been received into the Christian communion through the waters of baptism, and have become the elect and called of Jesus Christ, which is the most blessed thing that could befall you.

II.

The gathering. When, after the night's work, the fishers row to shore and empty their nets, it is found that they have caught living things of divers sorts; together with useful fishes, others of no value. So, in the Church, the Gospel net is thrown out, and gathers all who enter it indiscriminately.

The Church presents a rich variety of all sorts. How many diversities, both outer and inner; high and low, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, refined and rude, masters and servants, the fortunate and unfortunate, the joyous and sorrowful, in the greatest manifoldness here meet together. Life otherwise makes much difference, but in the Church all are equal. One and the same net embraces all. One and the same word, to

which all listen. "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all," to whom you owe allegiance. One holy Lord's Supper, around whose table you are all gathered. In God's presence there is no respect of persons. The Church is the most equalizing power on earth.

Not the mere differences of the outer life: Oh no! The greatest diversities of the inner being here meet their level. "All are sinners and come short of the glory of God." Yet there are grades of sinners. Though all are called, all do not believe alike. Some disbelieve, remain unconverted, and forfeit their heritage of sonship. All are invited: the poor, the halt, the blind, the lame. Some, unhappily, slight the invitation. God wills not that any be lost. So here and now you form a mixed assemblage. The visible Church is an indiscriminate gathering.

To be sure, people have now and then sought to set up a Church of the elect; a special community apart from the heterogeneous mass, a quite choice fellowship. They call the great Church which they forsake Babel, and flee to the little Zoar, the place of safety. Such is the way of sects who eschew the mixed assemblage, and desire a pure community of saints. The names may be diverse. The matter at bottom is the same in all. For a time it may be well. All things may be beautifully and quietly ordered. By-and-by it transpires that the members are not all unsullied alike. In a small household you can the more easily manage that all be relatively clean and orderly, but in a great hotel you cannot be without dust and tarnish: for that you must make up your minds. If God be reconciled to have in His Church all sorts, and His Spirit works in it for chastisement and comfort, for correction and instruction in righteousness, you also should be reconciled to it. It is not your duty

first of all to look to others what sort of people they are, but to yourselves, how much you come short.

You do not know whether others may not be changed for the better through the fellowship of the Church, under the influences of the Word and Sacraments. To be sure, the fish in the net remain what they were, the crabs remain crabs. But the prodigal can yet become God's child: the lost and condemned can be redeemed and made heirs of glory. For that end you are gathered together and placed under ordinances: the children are brought to baptism, and after due instruction, to confirmation, that the Holy Ghost may set forward His work begun in baptism. To that end you all must keep to God's Word and His Holy Table, and cannot dispense with Christian fellowship; or live to yourselves alone, neither hover in the free air, nor swim in the deep sea. It is for salvation, if you will it, that you have been gathered together in the Net of the gospel.

III.

The separation follows upon the gathering. When the net is full the fishers draw it out upon the shore, "gather the good together in vessels, but cast the bad away. Thus it will be at the end of the world. The angels will go forth and part the wicked from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

When the net is full, the fulness of the heathen having come in, when all possibilities have been exhausted, the great Day of Judgment comes. Things will not always go forward, as from to-day till to-morrow, and from this year to the next. All being has a

goal, so also history. This goal is the end of the present world, and the beginning of the future.

When the net is drawn to land, the time of work is over. The night is gone. A new day dawns. The old is passed away. All is new. At present you have the sea, with its agitations, the confused, restless movements of nations, until the Net is brought to land in a steadfast, enduring condition of things. In the Book of Revelation of the new order it is said, "There will be no more sea," that is, the present unstable condition will give place to one of stability and fixedness.

The Net to land, the separation goes on. "You all must be made manifest before the judgment seat of Christ." According to the revelation of your inner being and the unveiled contrasts of character now hidden, the parting will be made. It is a law of history and of reason that the contrasts sooner or later must part asunder. Wheat and tares spring up upon the same field, and until the harvest you let them grow together. Good and bad fish remain in the same Net until the secrets of all hearts are disclosed at the last.

Indeed, isolated times are provisional times of parting. The present time is such. Sharper than formerly the contrarieties part asunder. The confused mingling and embroilment cannot longer endure together. Every one must make a decided stand, and be loyal to his banner in the decisive question of all time, for Christ or for Antichrist.

You outwardly form a great fellowship, in manifold intercourse with one another, engaged in multifarious common tasks, whilst the contrasts all the time are present which part you in the very ground of your souls, whether God or the world fill your hearts, whether your condition be one of spiritual life or death,

of light or darkness. Only an "either" or an "or" is valid. You cannot see into the bottom of hearts. God alone is the Searcher, and will keep judgment. According as His eye sees, the hidden things will be made manifest. How know you what the issue may be? "So long as it is called to-day" it is the time of grace: there is a possibility of salvation. That the lost son return to the Father's house is not a history which merely once has happened, but which many a time repeats itself. At last the separation takes place. The good are selected, the bad cast away; the one chosen to life, the other consigned to perdition.

No word of Holy Scripture, and no thought is harder to bear than that of eternal damnation. The thought fills you with shuddering. Absorbed in it you grow stiff with horror. The word reluctantly passes your lips. It is too terribly earnest to speak lightly of, and too grievous to speak of at length. You do not easily reconcile yourselves to it.

Like the Landgrave of Thuringia before the Reformation, who, when he had seen the old miracle play of the "Ten Virgins" acted before him, was so much touched, and became so deeply thoughtful and of troubled spirit, so you cannot endure the momentous thought.

Now the variegated veil of this present life is spread over the abyss. Your eyes linger fondly on this veil with its shifting colours, willingly forgetful of what it covers. But on a future day grace will have exhausted its resources, and its time will have passed away. Then the sentence is pronounced which decides for ever. Saved or reprobate, received into the immediate fellowship of God, or shut out from it. Such is the contrariety; for God or against Him, Christ's or Antichrist's. But the world passeth away with its lusts. How, then,

should they who have sought their portion in the vanities of this life attain to the bliss of God ?

Therefore, so long as it is called to-day, listen to the voice of Him Who wills to gather you together under His pinions. Abide willingly in His net, that on a future day, when drawn to land, and the final parting comes, you may be received into His heavenly kingdom.

XLII.

The Promised Land.

(SUGGESTED BY THE FRENCH OF BERSIER.)

"Moses went up into the mountain of Nebo. . . . And the Lord shewed him all the land . . . and said, I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes, but thou shalt not go over thither."

DEUTERONOMY xxxiv. 1-4.

I.

THERE are in history few characters the grandeur of which equals that of Moses ; and perhaps the Old Testament does not contain a narrative of a sublimity more touching than that of his death.

Almost a century had passed away since in the palace of Pharaoh, where he had grown up amidst the luxuries of Egypt and royal splendour, the feeling of the disgrace of his people deeply affected his heart. From active sympathy with them he had been proscribed, and lived a considerable time in the desert, after which the Lord called him to fulfil the most formidable of missions. The meek and shrinking man, who at first drew back from the great enterprise, became resolute in withstanding a cruel and crafty tyrant, until Israel, having been delivered, was able to cross the Red Sea and to take the route to Canaan. But, after that, he had another sort of struggle, continuous and harassing, against an ignorant,

ungrateful, and rebellious people, not yet capable of supporting the burden of their religious freedom and destiny. He had, however, been able to succour and deliver them in all their rebellions and wanderings. At the very foot of Mount Sinai, where God revealed to him that sublime law, which should endure throughout the ages, he had seen them worship the golden calf. Misunderstood, often unheeded, he had taught, conducted, sustained them during forty years, always upright, watchful, indefatigable, pleading by turn God's cause with them and their cause with God. At last he was attaining the much-desired end of his wishes. The promised land was before him. The waters of Jordan alone separated him from it. The promised land! Oh, how many times in his solitary musings had he named and contemplated it, during the long nights in the desert, where under the starry heavens he used to commune with God!

The country where Abraham and Jacob were wont to pitch their tents was before him. There the kingdom of God on earth was about to be set up, the realization of fondly cherished desires to be brought about, the recompense of long-sustained and bravely endured hardships to be reaped.

From the silent summit of Mount Nebo the weary old man directs his eager gaze. Before him lies all the country from Gilead unto Dan. There is Jericho, the city of palms. Beyond extend the rich plains of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Naphtali. To the south appears the hilly tract of Judah, and in the distant horizon the great sea.

Yes, it is indeed the promised land, but he is interdicted from entering it. For a moment he gives way to anguish, but soon again, forgetting self, he thinks of the future of Israel. He contemplates with emotion those

places in which God will establish His sanctuary, those valleys whence one day shall go forth the salvation of the world—to the north, the distant mountains of Galilee; to the south, Bethlehem, Moriah, and the hill where the cross, which we revere, was destined to be erected. After having comprehended with a last look the country so long desired, he bows his head and dies.

II.

Beloved, from this grand scene there arises to us a great lesson. You in this congregation, whoever you be, have you not fondly dreamed here upon earth of a promised land? Have you not desired it? Have you not sometimes trusted to have attained it?

Yes, we all here on earth dream of a promised land. There is not one of you who has not expected a great deal from life, not one whom life has fully satisfied. Do not believe appearances. Do not trust to outward expressions of joy, to the giddiness portrayed on so many faces. The smiling exterior is but a mask. Beneath is the real being, who, if he be sincere, will tell you what he seeks and what he suffers.

For Moses the promised land was the country where the Lord ought to reign; where the glory of God should illumine and render fervent the whole soul; where the inextinguishable thirst for holiness should be satisfied.

Is the promised land for you that renewed earth where righteousness must really dwell? Is it the kingdom of God realized amongst men? Is it a God adored and loved, occupying the first place in your heart? Is it the Gospel accepted, the heart renewed, souls converted, the Church victorious? Is it, according

to the beautiful figure of Isaiah, the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth, as the waters the bed of ocean? Is that your first ambition, your most ardent desire, so that, happy otherwise and loaded with all goods here on earth, if that should fail you, all else also should?

In the primitive Church the faithful were expecting, on the ruins of the pagan world, the triumphal return of Christ. His reign on earth should inaugurate the new land of promise. Alas! the world has continued its course. The Kingdom of God to this day comes not with observation and splendour. The work of the Spirit is prosecuted secretly and mysteriously.

Let us not flatter ourselves. Those people who in our day are consumed by an insatiable desire for truth and righteousness, and sigh ardently after the kingdom of God, are exceptional. Let us not liken ourselves to those believers of whom the world was not worthy, to those humble and great witnesses of truth who, having all that they could desire, have held all for nothing, because the God whom they loved was unheeded upon earth. Alas! when nothing fails you, when you have health and strength, and fortune and hope, and earthly affections, do you feel strangers upon earth? Do you think of the Kingdom of God, and really and ardently pray for its coming? Oh, confess it! Your griefs have too often another character altogether. Whatever other interest may appear mingled with them, self-seeking really is your aim and motive. The promised land for you is your own good and happiness, pursued with an obstinate perseverance, and late, too late, bitterly wept. Well, these griefs, these regrets, all pervaded with selfishness, God in His infinite mercy does not spurn. It is often by them that He apprehends you in the right way, begetting in your hearts the secret desire of true

peace, of pardon, of eternal consolation. Ask yourselves; recall to mind your history.'

You had dreamed upon earth, it may be, of a great and beautiful existence, since it was not to mere vulgar pleasure that your nature was wont to prompt you. God had endowed you with talent, brilliant faculties, clear intelligence of whatever is excellent and beautiful. With what buoyancy you set out on your career! Generous influences were not without fruit in you. Every day seemed to make you better and stronger. To know more, to love better, and to act answerably, was your aim, scope, and happiness. Charming ways were opening up before you, veiled, indeed, with that morning mist beyond which, in spring, you anticipate the brightness and warmth of a fine day. Such was the promised land which you were contemplating with eager longing, and conceived yourself about to enter. All at once, perchance, disaster and losses came upon you. Illness impaired your strength. Riches took wings. Other crushing cares may have overwhelmed you and blasted your hopes. The selfishness and hardness of men may well have had for you many bitter and cruel surprises.

Or, suppose there has grown up round you a joyous circle of family. You have prepared for life the children God has given you. With what interest and happiness you used to mark the first awakening of intelligence! With what anxiety did you not follow them in their temptations! With what thankfulness did you not trace their progress and success! They can never know all that they have cost you in prayers, tears, and sacrifices. At last your cherished aim had been almost reached. A successful career was about to be crowned with those rich and happy fruits, the seeds of which a

watchful love had early sown in their hearts. Such may have been for you the promised land. But, alas! a day came, a day of anxiety, of terrible presentiment, terminated by a still more frightful reality. Into your desolated dwelling a mournful procession passed, and to-day it is in heaven that your tottering faith ought to seek the reality of that dear figure that floats before your troubled eye.

Shall I mention other deceptions? Shall I recall to your mind works long pursued with love and self-denial, but at the end of which you have reaped failure and ingratitude? You have seen your better intentions unheeded, perhaps misrepresented, and your best plans wrecked.

Meanwhile, in presence of this rigorous law which closes for you on earth the promised land, your troubled heart turns itself tremblingly toward God. You ask of Him, of this God of love, the secret of His ways which so much astonish and perplex you. Why? say you to Him, Why?

Beloved, the true reason of the ways of God will never be altogether known in this life. There is in suffering, for example, mysteries which surpass your apprehension. However, it is written the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him. Let us try to explain something of it.

If Moses do not enter the promised land, it is because he has sinned. In a solemn day before an unbelieving and rebellious people he had given way. Then for the first God says, "Thou shalt not enter into Canaan."

What! Was not God disposed and able to forgive the faults of His servant? Had not Moses been His witness, His prophet? Had he not hallowed His name,

defended His cause, desired ardently the more permanent establishment of His kingdom? Had not all his life been a long and continual sacrifice for truth? Should not the Lord whom he had so faithfully served any more remember mercy?

Yes. He remembered it. Moses was pardoned. He was not cast off. The God who had chosen and had preserved him graciously accepted his faith and penitence. But pardon and grace cannot efface the Divine holiness. So long as Moses remained on earth, he must necessarily suffer for his former transgression. As he sinned in presence of the people, he must likewise be smitten in their presence.

You have to-day a difficulty in comprehending this truth. In this degenerate age the sentiment of the holiness of God is being rapidly effaced. Your effeminate consciences ask for a soft preaching, which cannot find its way into the deeper places of the soul. With the gospel you say, "God is love," but you forget that the gospel never separates His love from His holiness. You forget it in face of Gethsemane, in face of Calvary, in face of those nameless griefs, which recall to your mind the fact, that pardon does not annihilate righteousness, and that the Divine holiness demands an expiation.

If you admit that God loves goodness above all else, that holiness is His very essence, you will apprehend that if relatively to sinners His name is love, relatively to sin His name is holiness; that suffering willed by Him is inseparably united to moral evil; that for impenitent sinners there is an insurmountable barrier to His favour and fellowship; and that upon sinners pardoned, suffering is still imposed in order to keep His holiness fresh in your memory.

You are wont to ask why life does not realize for

you its fond promises? Why your dreams of happiness have been so pitilessly frustrated? Holy Scripture answers, because you are sinners, because this earth which moral evil has soiled, cannot be for you the land of rest and of happiness, because God wishes thus to advertise you of it, and bids you to prepare for the full realization of your higher longings in His immediate presence.

You, O ransomed ones of the gospel, are wont to ask, why, after having believed in the pardon of God, in His love, in His promises, you are treated by Him with a rigour which confounds you? It is because God, who has made you His children, wishes still to make you sharers of His holiness. It is because He wills that suffering attached to your earthly life should recall to you every day that which you were formerly, and which, separated from Him, you still are.

Thus at all times God has acted even toward those who have most loved Him. Ask of Moses, why he did not enter into Canaan? Does he murmur? Does he complain? Does he accuse the Divine holiness? Oh no! he bows his head and worships.

Ask of Jacob, why his white hairs descend with sorrow to the grave? Does he accuse God? Oh no! he recalls to mind his own former cunning tricks, his conduct toward Isaac his father, his perfidy toward Esau his brother.

Ask David why he wandered as a fugitive upon the mountains of Israel, pursued, O unspeakable grief, by his darling son? Alas! he recalls his shameful fall and aggravated guilt.

Ask St Paul why his apostolate is nothing but a long martyrdom? He remembers he has kicked against the stings of conscience and persecuted the Church of God.

It is thus that God treats His greatest servants. Thus He accomplishes the saying that judgment must begin at His own house. Thus He recalls to those whom He has pardoned, and whom He saves, the fact that if they are the children of a God of love, they ought to be the children of a holy God.

III.

But over and above paternal discipline God has in view the strengthening of your faith.

Suppose it was given to you to realize your desires upon earth, to see your designs accomplished, your sacrifices recompensed, to reap, in one word, all that you have sown, what should happen? Why, that you should walk by sight not by faith, a sweet and pleasant walk, where every effort should be followed by its result, every sacrifice with its recompense. Who should not wish to be a Christian at that cheap price? Who should not seek this near and visible blessing? Ah, do you not see that the interested spirit of the mercenary should come as a cold poison to mingle itself with your obedience? Do you not see that your hearts, drawn toward the earth by the entire weight of your happiness, should soon forget the invisible world and your true, your eternal destiny? What then should become of the life of faith, the heroic struggle of the soul, which tears itself from the world to attach itself to its God?

Now, God expects of you better things, and according to the admirable figure of Holy Scripture, "As the eagle beareth the eaglets on her wing, stirreth them to shoot into the air, and fluttereth over them," so God plucks you from the world which is seen, to teach you

to soar toward your true fatherland. That is why He refuses to you here the repose, the sweet security of heart, and those joys where you would wish to stick fast. But know it well. He does not deceive you, for the true rest, the real happiness attends you still.

Oh, Moses! you were dreaming of a holy and blessed land across Jordan. You were seeing before you the sweet valleys and those shady and tranquil places, where rest was awaiting you. You were contemplating the sanctuary where the ark of the covenant should abide. On the mountains of Canaan you were hearing in anticipation, near the tombs of the fathers, the chants of faithful worshippers.

Alas! This vision was only a dream. Across Jordan, as in the desert, you would have found an ungrateful, idolatrous, and rebellious people. You would have seen the name of God dishonoured, His glory unheeded, and every step of the conquerors stamped by some outrage and dishonour.

Ah, better worth to die upon Mount Nebo, since God has in immediate reserve for you a better heritage, a promised land—in which you will in the truest reality enter into rest. There sin is no more. There pure voices proclaim the glory of the Lord. There His sanctuary is raised in ineffable light and ideal beauty. There repose, in the bosom of infinite love, all those who like you have combatted for righteousness. There God reigns, surrounded with a countless multitude of His worshippers. Close your eyes, oh weary pilgrim! You will reopen them in the light of eternal life, in the heavenly Canaan, within the holy Zion, the Jerusalem that is above.

XLIII.

Carefulness in Little Things.

(SUGGESTED BY THE FRENCH OF BERSIER.)

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much."

ST. LUKE xvi. 10.

TO the observer of the works of God in nature, there are presented two aspects equally wonderful, the infinitely great and the infinitely small. On the one side there are the immeasurable dimensions of space, before which imagination stops appalled. There are limitless ages, whose course rolls across eternity.

On the other side there are marvels of light displayed on a scale of infinite minuteness, master works of organization, of mechanism and structure of which a drop of water may contain thousands.

To those who believe in the intervention of God in the history of humanity, an analogous spectacle is presented. On the one hand, the awful action of God conducting and moulding nations at His pleasure, making certain peoples His scourge, mowing down thousands by war, by epidemics, by storm and earthquake. On the other, His paternal goodness, providing for your smallest wants, ceaselessly watching over you, counting your every tear and grief.

Let us turn from contemplation of the Divine activity

in nature to the work of man. In our paltry life we also have a twofold activity. There are relatively great and little duties. The great duties are self-evidential and are ceaselessly suggested. You cannot violate them without the protest of conscience. To-day your attention is the rather to be directed toward little duties. There is more than one rock which it is necessary to shun.

I.

First, it is not right to be absorbed in them. You might think, upon seeing some people at work, that little things alone have any importance. They put them constantly in the forefront. They are preoccupied by them. Every detail is to them a business; every obstacle a mountain; every care a crushing burden. Small worries deprive them of calmness and serenity.

Let them remember that little duties ought to be performed in a large spirit, to be referred to the great principles or sentiments which form the mainspring of Christian activity. The soul in the most agitated life ought to bend toward an elevated end, as the frail bark under the strong hand of the pilot speeds over the waves which rock it towards the desired haven.

To make use of another figure. As single trees obstruct the view of the forest, so the paltry duties of every day often come in the way of the contemplation of the great whole of life.

Or, to recall a scene of the gospel. Martha, absorbed by the petty cares of the household, foregoes the more blissful lot of Mary who meditates, self-collectedly sitting at the feet of the Saviour.

To prefer little to great duties is the rock of Pharisaism. When the soul forgets its true end, the

loving service of God, it transfers its homage to unworthy objects. It thus strives in vain to satisfy the inextinguishable yearning after holiness which disquiets it. The more insignificant the objects, it is the more attached to them with superstitious and fanatic ardour.

Recall to mind the Scribes of the Gospel, filtering from their wine the gnat whilst gulping up the camel, paying tithe of the smallest herbs, counting the number of steps they were permitted to take on a Sabbath walk.

To-day customs have changed, but the same spirit is manifested. Thus Roman Catholicism is addicted to certain fastidious practices; the stranger they are the more importance they assume in the eyes of their votaries.

Thus the Protestant sectary also, losing sight of the great teachings of the Gospel, easily fancies that there is in fondly cherished little peculiarities of worship and doctrinal details, in the very smallness of his community, a somewhat privileged holiness. Far from enlarging the circle of the Divine mercies, he contracts them to the measure of his own narrow sympathy.

This deplorable error has done much to countenance the prepossessions of infidelity, and has afforded matter for its derision. To those who give way to it, we must emphatically insist on those cardinal duties, self-evidencing, pressing, imperious, to which all others ought to be subordinated, the great moral laws to which all details should be referred, just as the streams which furrow a valley must, in order not to be turned into a marsh, hurry toward the greater river of the district. Otherwise piety makes false advances, and in parting from the eternally binding obligations, justice, mercy, and truth, falls into ridiculous and odious excesses.

But there are aspiring and earnest natures which are the victims of scrupulosity. There are some minds preoccupied with researches into the Divine will, and painfully sensitive of not knowing enough. This is one of the realest and saddest of religious phenomena. Even after the most fastidious examination they tremble to take a decisive step. Absorbed on one side with painful retrospects of a past, whose errors bulk largely in their affrighted imagination, and on the other with apprehensions of the future, of which they anticipate the snares, they lose all confidence, joy, and peace. All this is touching, because there underlies these very scruples a serious yearning and endeavour after holiness, which being frustrated, the soul becomes the victim of a morbid sadness.

Let such keep in mind that salvation is of grace. In making it subject to the fluctuations of a troubled conscience, a lie is given to the word and promise of Almighty God. It is forgotten that you all are offered free pardon through Jesus Christ; that His redemptive work holds good for all who will to conform themselves to it; that there is expected from it the filial confidence and obedience of children, and joyous dedication of themselves to the divine service; and that the spirit of love and liberty which restores life to the soul can alone come from the transforming power of the love of God manifested in the cross of Calvary.

II.

Now that one or two rocks, which to some block up the way, have been pointed out, whilst keeping in mind the subordination of little duties to the cardinal

principles of morality, let us yet impress our minds with the great importance of them.

In fact little things, little sacrifices, little virtues may be said to form the woof of the moral life. Think of the inner devotedness, the almost unconscious succession of acts of everyday life necessary in order to the attainment of some great result, that goodness may triumph in its incessant struggle with evil, that patience may have its perfect work.

In the narrative of a battle your attention is specially drawn to the able manœuvre which at a decisive moment secures the victory, whilst you forget the previous calculations, the multiplied precautions, the painstaking discipline which have rendered the manœuvre possible. The toil must necessarily be sustained which places at the disposal of the general the right sort of troops, high-spirited, properly accoutred, furnished with all necessary stores. Suppose a single detail had been overlooked; that the discipline or disposition of the forces were faulty; that a sentinel or outpost had not been vigilant, and on peril of life uttered a cry of alarm, the victory might easily have been changed to a defeat. Such is a faithful image of the Christian life.

In casting a glance over the kingdom of God on earth, you see mainly the great struggles, the glorious triumphs and results which are associated with the names of great men. The previous self-denial and perseverance, the secret prayers and tears, the privations and sacrifices in order to a moral triumph, remain in the background. All these appear comparatively nothing. Like the grains of sand which form the shores of ocean, taken one by one they scarcely make a balance to oscillate, but placed side by side they break the fury of the billows.

In history, the greatest men have made most account

of little things. Neither in the political and military career, nor in the domain of art and poetry, has true genius scorned details. If it has never been absorbed by them, it has never deemed them unworthy of attention. Masters in the several arts and professions become proficient by painstaking and attention to details, as well as by the observance of the great principles.

Cæsar tells you in his "Commentaries" the exact measurement of his entrenchments, and the proportion of parts and manner of constructing bridges over rivers, and other the minutest particulars of his campaigns.

Michael Angelo curbs the vehemence of his genius, and with the coolness of a mathematician patiently observes the play of the muscles and the other exactly ascertained phenomena of anatomy.

As Rembrandt applied himself to pound colours in order to give a magic tint to his masterpieces, so Racine is scrupulous to select the proper word for the exact expression of his thought.

Whilst deciding the destinies of great kingdoms, Napoleon I. felt exasperated over the least error which his eagle eye detected in the calculations submitted to him.

But let us return to the gospel. Jesus Christ has accomplished the greatest revolution which the world has ever seen.

Well, He has taught you of what value are the tears of a Magdalene; the two mites of a poor widow cast into the treasury; the contrition of the publican; other little things of which none before ever made account.

The life of Christ is the most admirable comment on the words before you. "Be faithful in that which is least." What, then, is the secret of His conquest of the world? Behold Him in Galilee, amongst those humble

people from whom He selected His first disciples. None are considered unworthy of His special attention. No greater sphere is desired for His activity. The souls of Samaritans, too, lay claim to His instruction and concern. He never thinks His pains lost in teaching those reputedly sinners. There is no grief which He is not ready to console.

III.

Thus very great examples in the world, the greatest example of all in the gospel, preach to you faithfulness in little things.

You have in your mind a grand ideal of holiness. The moral beauty of the gospel attracts and exercises a powerful influence over you. It speaks to you of a consecrated life, if need be of a crucified one, a martyrdom.

Compare with this ideal contemporary society, or even the Church. How sad and bitter words escape you! You condemn your epoch. You denounce the prevalent follies and vices. You sigh after the restoration of rectitude, of reverence for the great moral principles of life, and the authority of conscience.

Well, this holiness, admired on a large scale, there is an immediate opportunity of realizing in detail. There is a habit of effeminacy in your life. Therefore there needs retrenchment of your self-indulgence. You detest the corruptions of society. You deplore its laxity. But have you no covetousness or other evil desires to root out? Is there no unwholesome reading to put away from you? No frivolous society from which to part company? No objectionable connection to give up?

You start back. Where is now the generous ardour

which found expression in glowing words? Where the moral strength of which you boasted? Where the disinterestedness? Why need to seek them in vain, when the hour of applying them is come?

Take your ideal of charity. You contemplate with emotion the work of love which the Lord expects from you. You embrace in your sympathy the whole of humanity. The poor and disinherited lay strong claims on your compassion.

There is frequent opportunity of exercising this charity which you admire. At your door is a poor man, in misfortune probably from no personal fault; or a wretched woman, not an ideal and poetic case, but coarse, vulgar, dirty, or some other benevolent claimant.

A slight sacrifice, one gratification fewer, a little less luxury in your dwelling, a little more of simplicity in your life. That is all that might be necessary in such a case.

Or, it may be, there are embittered hearts near you, whose sufferings a little sympathy might alleviate. Here is a rancour to obliterate, an offended brother to reconcile. There a stray sheep to lead back to God.

In the more ordinary circumstances of everyday life the question may be one of simply showing meekness and sweetness of disposition, a little of self-forgetting humility.

Oh, beloved, the spirit which Jesus Christ manifested towards you, strive to show to one another.

XLIV.

“The Salt of the Earth and the Light of the World.”

(SUGGESTED BY THE GERMAN OF CARL SCHWARZ.)

“Ye are the salt of the earth . . . Ye are the light of the world.”

ST. MATTHEW V. 13-15.

AN old proverb purports, there is nothing more useful than salt and sunlight. Thus the Lord calls His people “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world.” The first indicates a power of the inner life: the other, a power of the outer life. Twofold the Lord thus denotes the call of His Church.

I.

“Ye are the salt of the earth,” indicates a power of the inner life.

Salt pervades with its peculiar efficacy all with which it is mingled. Thus the Church should exercise an inner energy and influence on the entire life. As the leaven penetrates the dough and leavens it, so salt likewise penetrates.

In an old Christian writing which has been handed down to us there is a famous passage which says, “That

which the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world. As the soul pervades the whole body and holds it together, so Christians, the world in which they dwell.

"Ye are the salt of the earth" is a proud word. From the small company which surrounded Him, from the narrow space which circumscribed His activity, the Lord looked forth to all the length and breadth of the world, and said, "Ye are the salt of it."

Here He saw the beginning of a new movement which should pervade the nations, and renew their collective life. No one of the great teachers of the pre-Christian age had ventured to think or speak thus. He does not merely collect a circle of scholars and disciples; not merely establish a confederacy to regenerate His native land; not merely give new laws and ordinances for the outer life. Oh no! a new power for the inner man should go forth from Him, and become the portion of the human family—should go forth from His small company of followers, and from the Church of future ages.

Here is more than Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras, or whoever else may be named.

"The salt of the earth!" It checks corruption. All earthly life is subject to the law of decay, and perishes with time, even the best and most beautiful! "All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man is like the flower of grass," even the richest endowments, the apparently inexhaustible powers!

The wisdom of the Brahmans has degenerated to deception and imposture. The people of India of to-day know not how to discriminate between the appearance and the reality of things. The arts of the Greeks, whose relics we wonder at, at last ministered to vanity and

pleasure. Its representatives became the objects of contempt to the Romans. But the power of the Romans, too, went to ruin in frantic enjoyment, and the clamour of the populace was for nothing higher than food and games. The culture which it carried into the provinces ended in a slough. The description of the prevalent corruption, which is handed down to you, borders on the incredible.

"The salt of the earth!" The Church of Christ threw the sharp salt of the Word of God into this universal corruption, and so saved the world of the coming age. In the olden civilizations there had been eloquent rhetoricians, writers and teachers of virtue and wisdom. The apostle, however, says that "the kingdom of God stands not in word but in power." The benign gospel which we preach is the imperishable, all-quicken-
ing salt of humanity.

Such is the Church's call to-day as heretofore. You may not say it is an effete, obsolete force, long past and gone, a myth of the olden times. It is no past history, but a living energy still of the present.

You have all read the sad and shocking history of the French Revolution at the close of the eighteenth century. Some of its results may still be traced, and serve for a continual sermon. You naturally inquire what prepared the way for this awful tragedy? After the French Catholics, under their great king, Louis XIV., who otherwise achieved great glory, expelled the godly Huguenots, and thus robbed their nation of the salt of its true manhood, its society sank ever the more deeply into selfish enjoyment and moral laxity. What wonder if at last all props broke, and the universal overthrow buried even the good and innocent under its ruins!

You say, perhaps, such was France, but we are English. Are you better than they? Oh, what awful disclosures from day to day, from week to week, do you not read in the newspapers, besides those not so very far from your own doors, what your ears hear, and your eyes see—what alarming signs and witnesses of deeply-rooted and widespread degeneracy!

It was a winged word of the olden world, "Strive first of all after money. Honours come after money." Has that not also become a watchword of your time?

What need to ask about the course of degeneracy? The feelings become ever more blunted. The conscience with its former modest shrinking from vice, and indignant scorn of wrong, is gradually lulled into insensibility. Moral callousness is the worst sign of all. Not seldom is it those high in position, who are best versed in corruption, from whom the moral poison spreads to the lower levels.

What you read of the immorality of that great Babel on the Thames is repeated more or less in all our large towns. Is not the wealth there amassed too often spent in gambling, carousing, and worse licentiousness? But amidst the rottenness, the Church of Christ is placed, and the word "salt of the earth" is properly spoken of it.

Our Lord's words at times were gentle and soothing like the most emolient oils, applied assuagingly to the wounds and bruises of the diseased or maimed. But when too often He found it needful, He used biting and sharp invective—words keener and more incisive than the sharpest weapon. The word of God which the Church administers may not always be lenient, but severe and uncompromising in regard to sin, and vice and coarseness.

"Ye are the salt of the earth" denotes a power of the inner life.

II.

"Ye are the light of the world" denotes a power of the outer life.

"I am the Light of the world" holds good in the first place of the Lord Himself. He came as the Light into the world, as the Light of a new day shines in the darkness and night of peoples. Since then you walk in His light. Through Him you have become children of the light, and should in the Lord be lights to the world. "Ye are the light of the world," a prouder and greater thing cannot be spoken of you. Christ Himself the Light dwells in you. Christ in His Church makes it a light. He walks in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks. So the revelation of St. John depicts Him. Therefore the Church is the light of the world. The city set on a hill may not be hidden. It cannot, for it lies before the eyes of all. When you kindle a light you do not put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, so that it give light to all in the house.

The lamps of the ancients in use amongst the Jews were small lanterns. If they wished to lighten a great room, the lamp was set upon a stand. If they went out the light was not extinguished but put under a corn measure which stood at hand, to save themselves the trouble of relighting, since they had none of the facilities we have for that purpose.

Beloved, the first thing ever is to save your own souls. The eternal Light which at Bethlehem came into the world, must shine into your hearts and drive away the night of darkness and of sin. You are, however, here

not for yourselves alone, but for ministry to others. "In ministering to others I am consumed" is the inscription on an olden candlestick. In ministry to others you should spend yourselves. Such is your call. Not to preserve the earthly life, but to spend and use it in the service of Christ. "To shine to all who are in the house!" Not merely to a small circle of friends, or a gathering of like-minded, with the thought, Let others outside take heed how they save themselves in the universal deluge of corruption, our business is to save ourselves. Oh no! to all who are in the house—to all in the Church—to all in the nation! Love to the Word of God and to the Church cannot ignore the nation to which you belong—within whose precincts you have been born and brought up, and for which you have so much to render thanks. The Church and nation belong to one another. Oh! be sure, the best thing for the nation and for the world is the Word of God, the testimony of the eternal love of God for all in Christ Jesus.

It is foolish talk to say religion and Christianity is a private matter. To be sure it is a private matter. It is the paramount concern of each single person, the one affair above others of your innermost life. How it stands between you and your God is the supreme question.

But just because it is the innermost thing, it is also the most universal, the main concern of the collective life, the matter of the fullest publicity and interest. "That which I speak to you in darkness, speak ye in the light, and that which you hear in the ear proclaim from the house tops," says the Lord to His disciples.

When the Apostles stepped forth publicly in Jerusalem they said, "Let the whole house of Israel know

assuredly." When St. Paul made his appearance at Athens he addressed the people there collectively, "Ye men of Athens!" When Luther sounded his trumpet, he turned himself to the whole German nation. And so you also are entrusted with the gospel to make its light shine for all in the house, in all its corners and recesses, that is, on all the manifold sides and aspects of your collective public life.

Well, the Gospel of God will remain what it is, the old, ever the same preaching of repentance and faith. It will not at some time or other become a national system of economy, or a social science, or a theory of moral problems. As little will it be a system of jurisprudence or of sanitary reform. "Who made me a judge or disposer of inheritance amongst you?" the Lord asked. His preaching was always the one thing, "The kingdom of God!" "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." "Repent and believe the Gospel." But it is meant for all, and suitable for all, because all everywhere alike need it.

However you may otherwise order the things of earth, whether and how you lay down hard and fast rules regarding the number of hours of work;—however you may regulate the relations of capitalist and labourer, and whatever else is of that sort:—of it all the word of the Lord has weight for the Church, "Who set me amongst you a judge or apportioner of inheritance?" The Church's call is to proclaim the gospel. The gospel is for all and all for it indiscriminately.

That a free way for it remain open, that its light be able to reach all, and all be able to come to it—that alone, but that at any rate the Church must demand, and accordingly human and earthly things should be so ordered. The Word of God for all! Such

is your trust. How shall the invaluable blessing become the portion of all?

What are the candlesticks? Upon what is the light of the gospel placed? Are they not your Churches in which the Word of God is preached? Is it not your office to carry forth the glad tidings of salvation into hearts and homes, into the back courts and lanes, into the nooks and garrets, wheresoever men dwell, with the entreaty never to be silenced, "Be ye reconciled to God"?

The very spires and towers of churches from the midst of the dust and mire of earth, from the bustle of the streets, from the unrest of work, and the other distractions of earthly life, refer you to the eternal heights. "Lift up your hearts" is their silent voice. The brazen tongues of their bells would make the call of the eternal love, which dwells in the height and has appeared upon earth, ring also into the solitary chamber and the lonely heart.

People nowadays are more zealously careful that light and air pervade all dwellings, not merely the stately houses with their large windows, but also back courts and lanes, that they be not overcrowded, but freer and more open than heretofore.

Very well! Shall the light of the eternal Sun not also penetrate into the dark corners of the heart and the out-of-the-way dwellings? Shall not the word of the eternal love be borne into the large and thickly-packed neighbourhoods in which specially the labourers dwell? Do not these need it before all others?

Shall I paint to you the pictures which there meet you? He who has once beheld the moral ruin, the ignorance of spiritual things, the estrangement from church, from faith and all which saves and makes joyous, cannot forget it.

Is it fear for the future which is there so ominous, that affects you so deeply? Oh no; it is compassion. Such sights moved the Lord to pity. Shall they not move you?

Contemplate the crowd which meets you when of an evening the factories and work-rooms of large towns empty. Youthful figures confirmed a few years ago, in whose eyes a beam of eternal light from God then shone! How is it now? The eyes wearied and deadened by the service of sin, or burning with unholy fire! What sort of a history can some of them not tell? Let me be silent on it.

But the children! the children of the house—the newly baptized? Are they not bound up with you spiritually? Will not God on a future day call for a reckoning of your sacred charge? The churches, their rulers, their ministers, their members—every one according to his place and opportunity! If God ask after the souls of your brother men, shall you, then, answer, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Would it not be revolting in the Lord’s eyes? Shall you refer to what you have already done? Alas! that is much too small.

“I have come,” the Lord says, “to kindle a fire upon earth. What would I the rather than that it be already kindled?” Shall His word and His love not kindle your hearts and illumine the candlesticks with new radiance, so as to give light to all?

XLV.

The Garden of the Heart.

(FROM THE GERMAN OF CARL GEROK.)

"Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue ; and to virtue knowledge ; and to knowledge temperance ; and to temperance patience ; and to patience godliness ; and to godliness brotherly kindness ; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," etc.

2 ST. PETER i. 5-8.

"**T**HE Lord comforts Zion. He maketh its wilderness a pleasant garden, and its field like a paradise."

In such strains Isaiah prophesies of the future blooming of the kingdom of God. The lost garden of Eden shall at the end of days be restored greater and more beautiful than before.

Of this future glory there is yet little to be seen. The world as it now is appears rather like a desert where few plants of God flourish ; as a field of battle and of death, drunk with blood, sown with corpses ; as an arena or wrestling-place of wild passions, of carnal thoughts and endeavours.

Zion is yet a wilderness, but here and there green oases appear in the wide waste. Each Christian community presents a little garden of God, a hedged-in piece of paradise : single hearts, planted there with the

seed of the Divine Word, blossom in faith, hope, and love, and are fruitful in good works.

To be sure, St. Peter's discourse here is not in express words of a garden of flowers and fruit. Still, if you consider all the virtues which the apostle desires to see amongst you, the beneficence of grace, the views he opens up, you will, as Luther says, see all holy things in the heart as in a beautiful, pleasant garden—fine, tender, handsome flowers, all sorts of joyous thoughts towards God.

The garden of the heart is our subject.

There are three points: (1) the heavenly fostering; (2) the plants in the garden; and (3) the views from it.

I.

First, consider the heavenly fostering of this garden of the heart.

St. Peter says, "His Divine power hath given unto you all things that pertain to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who hath called you to glory and virtue."

God is not a hard Master who will reap where He has not sown. He is the rather a diligent Husbandman, who sets at work all His godly appliances of grace. Let us select the principal matters that belong to the heavenly fostering.

(1) The first requisite is the diligent Sower, who scatters liberally the Divine seed, the knowledge that pertains to life and godliness, the germ of all good.

By nature you are like waste land. With all gifts of heart and powers of intellect you bring forth at best tares, thorns, and thistles. To see what the human heart

is like without the Divine Word, survey the heathen world with its briars of superstition growing luxuriantly, with the wild tares of its follies and vices, with the corrupt fruits of its abominations. Behold, too, in the midst of Christendom neglected children, growing up wild and rude, without the discipline and admonition of the Lord; lost sons and daughters who have torn from their heart the word of life planted in childhood; old, grey servants of sin who have thrust it from them all their life long; not to speak of hearts in which the Divine seed has not been scattered at all, the knowledge of Jesus Christ not planted at all.

As every year a diligent gardener arranges and plants his ground, and every season has its special tasks, every day work peculiar to itself, so every year, from Sunday to Sunday, the great Gardener of souls makes His progress through your lives, and will to-day plant this, and eight days hence that knowledge; will to-day sow faith, to-morrow love, then patience; anon hope, or some other Divine flower, through the instrumentality of His Word.

(2) Note a second thing pertinent to the heavenly fostering, the well of grace.

Every garden requires a fountain for watering; otherwise the best seed withers. In the Christian heart there gushes a little brook which makes the seed living and fruitful.

What is the diversity of Divine power bestowed amongst you if it be not the manifold gifts of the Holy Ghost? What ministers to life and godliness if it be not the Spirit of God? What avails all sowing of the Divine Word if grace do not water the heart and make it fruitful? Teacher and preacher, father and mother, know it well from bitter experience.

What is your heart, with all its knowledge and skill, with all its wishing and struggle, if not watered from the living fountain of God? A dry, parched soil, sterile, sapless, and powerless. But how sweet and refreshing if you draw grace for grace, power for power, comfort for comfort, from the inexhaustible well of the Divine mercies!

Four streams once watered the garden of Eden. In the Christian heart there springs a well which sends forth its water morning and evening, noon and midnight, bearing along in its four currents light and comfort, peace and joy. There draw, dear soul, whatever refreshing is needful for your higher life. If at any time the well appear dry, strike with the staff of prayer, and there will spring water from the rock.

(3) There is further needed, as third appliance in spiritual gardening, prosperous weather from above, sunshine and clouds, tepid breezes as well as fructifying thunderstorm. Behold, the heavenly Fosterer sends thriving weather to your hearts. Now the blue sky is overhead. Now black clouds are piled up and overshadow you. Now you stand in the warm sunshine of fortune; now under the chilling storm of adversity. Now the most genial spring winds play around your brow; now you quake to the innermost marrow, to the deepest root of your being, under the hurricane of affliction.

Storm and calm, sunshine and tempest, sorrow and joy, alike, by the leading of the Divine grace, serve to the end that the garden of your heart thrive, that goodness with its fruits grow up and increase in you.

II.

Consider, in the second place, the excellent and charming growths of the garden.

On the ground of all that has been bestowed on you by grace, the apostle exhorts, "Apply all diligence, and add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these be in you, and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of your Lord Jesus Christ."

Oh, what a fulness of beautiful plants blossom in a Christian heart! Bend your every endeavour to the culture of them.

Behold, your faithful Creator and Redeemer has spent much pains on you. His only begotten Son has suffered and sacrificed all most prized and valuable in life. His death, sweat, and holy blood have been poured out for you.

Show, then, your thankfulness by spiritual growth. Grow in wisdom and grace as in stature and in years. The root of all Christian virtue is, to be sure, faith, which cherish above all, since from it all other good springs.

Well, there are in unbelieving hearts so-called virtues, an exterior legality which you do not exactly characterize as wrong, a susceptibility easily moved by others' suffering, a good-natured officiousness which readily obliges, a zeal quickly blazing up for what appears beautiful and good. But if you look nearer what are all these virtues? Plants without root. They are dashed to the ground by every blast of affliction. They

droop and wither under the drought of tribulation. The virtues of the natural man have justly been called splendid vices, specious but delusive.

Where, however, virtue grows from a faith deeply rooted in the Divine Word, whose fibres penetrate into the eternal rock of salvation, the heart is strong and capable of real spiritual increase.

Into the quiet hidden ground of faith you cannot see. Therefore you must verify it to yourselves and attest it to others, by the various and manifold virtues that grow out of it.

Behold what lovely blossoms in the garden of the heart open up before you! There blooms one flower after another. Here the violet of humility and discretion exhaling its fragrance in secret. There the lily of temperance and chastity with its virgin flower cup. Here blooms, with crown of thorns and nails of the cross transplanted from Golgotha, the passion flower of patience. There godliness raises its high head to heaven like a sunflower, ever turning to the bright blaze of light. That, too, which shines most beautiful and smells the sweetest, dyed in the blood of Christ, the rose of love, the half-opened bud of brotherly love which for the most part shows itself towards associates of the faith, and the wide-opened rose of a hundred petals, universal benevolence, which does good and blesses without tarrying to ask, "Who is my neighbour?"

Ah, what more need one mention of such charming growths, beyond those which the apostle recounts! There is the mild olive tree of peace; and there the steadfast palm of joyous courage which always roots the more firmly the more the storm shakes it. There is the ever-green pine of hope, and many divine plants besides, each after its own kind.

Are there not too many already enumerated, more than any one of you has to show?

Oh yes! But if the question were merely one of isolated virtues, every one amongst you had surely something to look to. Then should the slothful extol his modesty, and the miser his temperance, and the indifferent his patience, and the loveless his pity, and the person heedless of the thoughts and opinions of others his brotherly love, and the unbeliever his universal philanthropy.

Thus men behave with their virtues and other good qualities. Every one chooses from the Christian garden the flower which best suits him, which agrees most with his temperament. He places it on his breast, and comforts himself with the thought, This one virtue covers the multitude of his sins.

Not so! In faith all the other virtues are present in germ, and are evolved from it—modesty, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly love, universal benevolence.

One flower amongst weeds does not make a garden. One apple on a tree does not make an autumn. "Every one," says the apostle, "who sins in one point, though otherwise he keep the whole law, is guilty of all." "Whatever is true, whatever honourable, whatever honest, whatever pure, whatever lovely and of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of it."

All that? Yes, all that has a place in a Christian heart, it may be in germ, but it is there.

Thus to the root of faith belongs the blossom of virtue, and to the blossom of virtue the fruits of righteousness.

III.

From the garden of the Christian heart there are some blessed prospects, glorious views. It is a bright and delightful feature if one, through bushes and trees, over hedge and wall, behold a blue aerial mountain in the sunny far distance.

Therefore, mark attentively the further exhortation of the apostle to "exercise the more diligence to make your calling and election sure, for where you do so you shall never fail, and so an entrance shall be abundantly ministered to you into the everlasting kingdom of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Beloved, your eye is there, as it were, directed to three great prospects, to three holy majestic mountains which from afar look down into your garden, admonishingly, comfortingly, promisingly.

(1) The first mountain which from afar with rugged majestic summit presents its imposing form is Mount Sinai, the mountain of appeal. From it a voice reaches your ear, "You are bound by holy covenant to declare the virtues of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light." "Be ye holy as your Father in heaven is holy." From there one often sees at eventide the lightning of the Divine wrath, and hears in the distance the thunder peal of God's judgments. Look often over to this holy mount, which admonishingly stands forth so prominent in your small life.

And if it appear well with you in the garden of your heart, if you complacently rejoice in your self-plucked flowers and fruit, if you desire to repose upon your laurels as if you had nothing more to do, let this mountain admonish you. Soul, soul, it is time! Death and

eternity are near. "Use diligence to make your calling and election sure, for where you do so you shall never fail."

(2) The second mountain which looks over into the Christian garden is Golgotha, the mount of election. From there a voice too strikes the ear, "God has chosen you as His children, elected you in Christ Jesus. Your sins are forgiven. You are reconciled to God. Thence the air of peace breathes into your hot day work. If your poor heart moan in its sins like a bruised reed, it will be refreshed and quickened by the mild gentle breeze of the eternal mercy from Golgotha. Thither look, dear soul, if your little garden be parched and droop in the heat of affliction, if you feel yourself before God so poor and naked as an arid and barren land, as a tree stripped of its foliage, and say, "I lift up my eyes to the mountain from whence cometh my help."

"Who will condemn? Christ is here who died, yea rather is risen again, who is at the right hand of God, and intercedes for you."

(3) The third mountain of blessed prospect is the heavenly Zion, the mount of promise. There is the entrance to the eternal kingdom of your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. There is the new paradise, the heavenly garden of God, where the palm of peace waves, and the stream of life gushes, where you yourselves should bloom before the Lord in unfading beauty. From there the breath of eternal life blows; the distant harmony of the heavenly harps reverberates.

When the evening of your life draws near and your day sets, and the shadows of death darken all around, and the flowers of life shiver in the night wind, look over to the bright mountain of the heavenly Zion where the sun never sets, because your Saviour Himself is the light of it.

XLVI.

Reflections suggested by the Contemplation of Dying Nature.

(FROM THE GERMAN OF VON V. AMMON.)

ST. MATTHEW ix. 18-26.

THE vicissitude of weakness and of recovered strength, of decayed life and newly recruited youth, is nowhere shown so clearly and intuitively as on the boundary between Nature and faith in the gospel now before you.

First you see a quiet sufferer, who, after long years of pain, which no resource of the physicians' art could alleviate, draw near to Jesus with the calm confidence of a believing soul, and by the mere touch of His dress recover health.

In the second place there appeared a weeping father who wished his dying—and as he spake to Jesus, his actually dead—daughter touched by the hand of the Saviour. Not fruitlessly did he ask. His confidence was rewarded by a startling awakening of the dead one to life.

These narratives forcibly suggest to you at this season several more mature reflections springing from faith at the contemplation of dying Nature.

Such contemplation is: (1) Instructive to your

understanding; (2) fraught with profit to your heart; (3) animating to your hope; yet (4) faith alone can contribute the full power and confidence needful to your virtue and repose.

I.

The aspect of dying Nature is instructive to your understanding. Its gradually approaching lifelessness reminds you of the measured diminishing of your own powers. Slowly and gradually Nature, but a short time ago blooming, sinks into a condition of torpidity. The reflection imparts a feeling of earnest and solemn sadness. If the devastations which, in the course of autumn, you perceive around you, were the work of a moment, the result of a tempestuous storm, or of a deleterious dew, or of a destructive frost, which in a trice robs the forest of its adornment and strips the majestic oaks towering toward heaven, you surely would be amazed and mourn, though your heart would be more open to a feeling of repugnance and dread than to a calm and touching sympathy.

Now, however, when the power of life in plants, formerly so mighty, so struggling upward, gradually sinks down from its high aspiring, when the last flower of summer, in presentiment of its near end, blossoms and anon fades, when one leaf after another, in a succession of colours, declares the lingering transition to destruction, who should not here contemplate with emotion the balanced vicissitude of strength and lassitude? Around whom should not the thought of death in calm and friendly image hover? Who should not, in the solemn cessation of the pulse of Nature, recognize the visible interweaving of the omnipotence which awakes and

raises up, and at the determined time allows the life of the world to sink and be exhausted?

The thought of decaying Nature, to be sure, suggests the quiet, measured vanishing of your own powers of life. True, the plant will be once more clothed with its peculiar glory, and again robbed of its adornment. Without feeling and knowing, it grows green and blossoms, is crowned with fruit, and then disappears according to a fixed determined order of the time of the year, which you can foresee and reckon upon, and so far you are indefinitely raised above it in insight, consciousness and continuance of life. But have you not altogether, has not every man in special, his own spring, autumn, and winter? Is the measured play of your powers, is the number of your days, not quite as fixed as the blooming time of plants? Does not the All-knowing One, do not the angelic spirits look down with far higher repose and assurance on the fleeting course of your earthly existence than you remark the shifting drapery of mourning Nature?

Does the Lord, in the figurative language of Holy Writ, not cause you to pass away like a stream, like a sleep, like grass that blooms in early morn, but in the evening is cut down and withers?

Where, after a longer or shorter interval, shall be the vigorous forms of beauty which now, as so many citadels of life, raise their proud heads in your midst? Where, soon, shall be the wise who lift their practised eye to heaven, and reckon the courses of the stars at remote periods? Where, after a brief space, the bold heroes rest, who, at the head of mighty armies, hasten from victory to victory, and, crowned with the olive garland of peace, directly thirst for new conquests?

Oh! be sure that it is a kindness and grace of God

that you cannot number the days of your life, as they have been recorded in His book. Your pre-eminence to the fading plant lies, as in other things, so in the fact that your continuance here is not like theirs, a known, definite measure of time, but is bound up with an inner measure of power, which remains hidden from your view. It is the privilege of the transfigured ones in the dwellings of glory to look down with sympathizing love from the fatherland of life, where death is no more, upon you, their brothers, still subject to the transmutation of perishableness.

We therefore say that the contemplation of dying Nature is instructive to your mind because the periodical return of its lassitude reminds you of the higher order of your frailty and transientness.

II.

Just so, in the second place, this contemplation is fraught with profit to your heart, in so far as you see before your eyes outside of you the fruits of consummation, which so often miss your view in the circle of your personal life.

Before Nature wraps itself in mourning, it presents to you and your fellow-creatures certain fruits of consummation to serve your convenience, and to prolong your transient life. The green corn ripens for you to harvest. The meadows produce rich nourishment for your cattle. The trees deck themselves with foliage, to cheer and refresh you with their wholesome fragrance, and at last deal out to you plentifully their golden fruits. The moss spreads its soft carpet. Each stalk puts forth its flower-cup or clustered loveliness to instruct and multiply your delights with the special contribution

of its exquisite design and symmetry. And now the great reckoning of the year is being completed. Now the diligent countryman joyfully, with full hand, receives the crowning gifts of beneficent Nature, which has exhausted its genial powers in thousandfold productiveness and gifts. And yet once more it opens its quiet bosom, like a faithful mother, to receive the golden seed corn, and to preserve the hopes of the next year.

As a good father with gentle hand apports out to his children the products of the industry of a whole life, and then, with serene satisfaction, closes his languid eye, so gardens and plains in the mellow splendour of the evening sun present to their grateful possessor their last benefits, and sink on the morrow, like an impoverished giver, divested and desolate, into quiet mourning.

How sad it is that you so often miss this consummation in the circle of your own life! At whatever stage you have arrived, various powers and faculties are entrusted to you, which you are bound to educate and strengthen, which at least you should exercise and maintain in well-balanced activity. But have you not often enfeebled them by indolence and effeminacy, marred them by intemperance, squandered them by lust, unhinged them by manifold other excesses? In whatever calling you labour, you should, in the course of a year, be richer in knowledge, more dexterous in your circle of activity, more skilled in the nature and destiny of man, wiser from manifold experiences, firmer and more unshaken in faith on God and His holy guidance.

What wholesome feeling of your weakness will not the sight of dying Nature awaken in your souls when you ask yourselves what have you done? How have you used the world? How have you improved your

inner man? How have you prepared yourselves beforehand for the solemn hour when the sentence of the Judge awaits you? "Every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire." Truly you can read in the book of Nature what is good and what the Lord your God doth require of you. Calm thoughtfulness at this season of the year can thus be fraught with profit to your heart.

III.

Such contemplation may, thirdly, be very enlivening to your hope, suggesting, as it does, the thought that if ministering Nature again revive, man, its superior, cannot sink into nothingness and dust. Nature, now apparently dying, will in a short time revive and renew itself. During the coming months of rest and torpidity it only collects new powers, only throws off an old garment in order to clothe itself in a new and more splendid one. Such, to be sure, is the old order of the changeful seasons, which teach you a long succession of experiences. The repose itself of plant life, indestructible in the midst of winter, expresses this truth of man's continuance with persuasive power.

For whom does the earth repose? For whom does vegetation lie dormant? For whom shall plain and forest, at the proper season, be again adorned with new pomp and beauty? Why, for a countless host of small and great beasts, which find shelter, habitation, nourishment and joy in all parts of revived Nature, and bow themselves again before man as their high superior. "Him God has made lord over the work of His hands. He hath placed all under his feet, both great and small

beasts, the birds under heaven, the fish in the sea, and whatsoever else passes through the paths thereof."

Should the first-born of this world, this prince of the visible creation, who lays his commands upon Nature, and by reflection and skill exercises a power of transformation over it, alone succumb and sink in the dust? Has he alone been born of chance, and departs as if he had never been? Does his life flit away as a cloud, and disperse as a mist which the sun scatters? Does his time vanish like a shadow, and his body crumble to dust, the sport of winds? Does his spirit evaporate like an unsubstantial breath?

Oh no! Your spirit, your reason, the ardent longing of your heart does not deceive you. Not in vain is your look raised to heaven, and your innocence and rectitude anticipate the rewards of consummation. The works of faith must have a glorious reward. The root of intelligence does not decay. God made man for eternal life, and designs him for a likeness of Himself. Therefore the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no detriment can affect them. Precisely there where all around you dies, and is resolved into its primal elements the hope in you shall be living, that your spirits will attain their final freedom in death, and will be exalted to a higher sphere of being in God's boundless universe.

IV.

Here, in the last place, the contemplation of dying Nature attains its crown and completion through faith, because faith alone imparts to you the power of a heavenly renewal, and impresses the seal of immediate certainty on your hopes of eternity. You owe the

power of a heavenly renewal to faith, there precisely where the contemplation of Nature leaves you without comfort and hope.

All fruit which Nature bestows is the product of a progressive unfolding. The seed amongst thorns is choked for ever, the stalk hidden from view in its early beginning never grows up at all, or very rarely to a lank height. The flower smitten by a deleterious dew withers away with its inmost germs.

What now would your fortune be if all your failings and errors operated irrevocably and destructively on your moral nature, if every storm of passion blasted the stem of your spiritual life so irremediably in its crown and flower; if the man with the failings of youth, and the woman with the precipitancy of childhood, and the aged sire with the returning childishness of early days, be declared to have forfeited their dignity for ever, and be condemned to a sad and stunted existence in the world of spirits!

When Jesus turned round He saw the suffering woman, and said, "Be comforted, My daughter. Thy faith hath saved thee." Behold in the confidence of this patient an elevation of spirit which shatters the fetters of her infirmity, which defies the long-prevailing impotence of Nature, which, with inner assurance, steps to God's ambassador with the words, "If I only touch His garment I shall be whole." Thus faith leads weak and fallen man to his God and Saviour. "They who wait upon the Lord acquire new strength. They mount with wings like eagles. They run and are not weary. They walk and do not faint." Now He creates in them a new heart and imparts a right spirit. Now their confidence consists not in the power of Nature or of human wisdom, but in the power of God. Now they "put on the new

man which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness."

All feelings of the imperfection and frailty which the sight of dying Nature awakens in you will only sink you in deep melancholy if you do not by faith become righteous, and have peace through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore faith stamps on your hope of the future the seal of an immediate certainty. Nature dying and again reviving, the green corn shooting up from the earth, and so many other transformations, are speaking parables of your future continuance. But all such parables are partial and defective, and that which impends after death in heaven, the earth can show you only in the reflection of a splendid possibility. How altogether otherwise, how much surer and more determinately does faith speak, which turns away from the creature to the Creator Himself. To know God and Jesus Christ, as the ruler of the synagogue in the Gospel before us knew Him, is eternal life.

Yes, give place ye terrors of the grave, the inhabitant of this earth departing the life here, is not dead but sleepeth. So speaks the Spirit of the Lord, who dwells in you and quickens your mortal body. Fellowship with the Father, in virtue of which you share the Divine nature, declares so much. That nothing can snatch you from His loving hand, the union with His only-begotten One assures you, whose holy words find place in your inner being: "He who believes in Me shall live though he die." Because your Lord lives, you shall live also.

Thus gloriously the faith in Jesus transfigures the single teachings and hopes which dying Nature presents in dark veil. How calmly in thought do you follow the

gradual progress of its transmutation! How tranquilly do you contemplate the great change which may impend over yourselves during the coming months! How sure you can now be that you only go through those turns of the revolving seasons in order to reach the fatherland of truth and love, where the unfading crown awaits you!

Oh, Thou Mediator, glorified and raised above all changes of the earth, now we see that Thou art the Beginner and the Finisher of our faith. Now we struggle upward with new power to Thee, where there is no vicissitude of darkness and of light. Now we know that all who are born of God overcome the world. He who is born of God sinneth not. He keepeth himself pure and blameless until the day of his great change when Thy holy angels shall conduct him to the home of eternal bliss.

XLVII.

The Lost Silver Piece.

(FROM THE GERMAN OF CARL GEROK.)

ST. LUKE xv. 10.

REJOICE over the found silver piece is the call of the Evangelic Church.

The rejoicing woman, as the joyous shepherd with his lost sheep upon his shoulder, shadows forth God Himself, the Saviour, the eternal love: Jesus came to seek and to save the lost.

No longer visible upon earth, where and how and by what does the Saviour manifest His seeking? Is it not in and through His Church?

I.

What silver piece was lost? Why, the human soul, an alloy of heavenly and earthly matter, stamped with the image of God, worn out in the traffic of the world, lost in the mire of sin, highly valued by God, and sought out.

Such is the proper significance of the parable. To-day we may be permitted to make a different application of it.

When the Lord first sent forth His disciples on a preaching tour, He commanded them to take no pouch

or money in their girdles. And when St. Peter and St. John, on the first day of their office after Pentecost, were accosted by a beggar for alms, they replied that they had neither silver nor gold.

In regard to earthly goods, the Church of Christ has received from its Lord no hard and fast rules. Outer superfluity can never be your true happiness; outer need never your greatest misfortune.

Travelling money of another sort the apostles did take with them, from which not only themselves lived, but being poor, made many rich.

Note the treasure which the Lord bequeathed to His Church, which you are to economize and employ profitably until the end of days. This apostolic viaticum, this inalienable entail, comprises the eternal truths of salvation, as stamped distinctly on God's Holy Word.

The principal articles of faith are shadowed forth by the ten silver pieces.

A plain-looking money these ten pieces, and yet genuinely pure coin! They bear the image and superscription of Him who says, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Therefore they are of value in all lands and times, even there where earthly money is no longer of service, at the gate of death, and above in another land, in eternity.

A very old money, passed already through countless hands, and yet not worn out, not yet depreciated, whilst many a bulky piece of human wisdom, once widely current, has gone out of circulation.

The metal from which these pieces are struck is real silver, seven times tried in the fire, and the King whose image is on them reigns ever and eternally.

A small money! Not buy a loaf of bread, and yet a

rich treasure, so rich that those who know it never concern themselves about silver and gold! Whosoever has it is equipped for good and bad days, for life and death. A whole world may be enriched by it, a whole heaven purchased.

A blessed Christendom, if it held this treasure intact, faithful to the Lord's admonition, "Keep that thou hast that no one take thy crown."

Of these silver pieces there was one lost, only one! We would judge mildly. We would not say, the Church had ever lost all its treasure of saving truth. For even in the darkest times there was belief in one living God, Maker of heaven and earth. Jesus Christ, too, was honoured as Lord. God's holy will and commandments were taught. An eternal life after death was confidently hoped for. Souls by patience in good works sought for glory and immortality.

But one silver piece was lost, indispensable, irreparable, without which the else entire fund of faith were never sufficient. The silver piece which shows upon the one side the image of the Good Shepherd, and on the other the inscription, "By grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." The kernel and star of the whole Gospel, the free grace of God in Christ Jesus, the alone saving faith was lost, lay in a corner, robbed of its splendour, covered with dust, trodden under foot, scarcely forebodied by single timorous souls here and there.

The one silver piece lost without which the others were of small value! What avails to know one eternal, almighty, holy, and righteous God, whom conscience tells you is a consuming fire to the sinner?

What avails it to call Christ Lord, and not receive Him as your Saviour?

What avails it to have been taught the law and commandments of God, since daily experience tells you that though you may have the will, the performance fails!

What avails it to know of a heavenly home and eternal bliss if the help be wanting and the way barred, since you cannot go thither by your own power!

Let a segment be cut off the circle of saving truth, the other segments have no living coherence. There is danger that the whole treasure piece by piece be lost.

So it is with the Church. With the loss of the kernel and star of evangelic truth, the whole Gospel is not only imperilled; it may be altogether lost.

What some would put in its place, to wit, the spurious coin of priestly propositions, the gewgaws of vain ceremonies, the self-stamped mint of human merits, were delusive counters, which can comfort no heart, redeem no soul, purchase no heaven.

Thus it appeared in the house when the woman lost her silver piece. In the outer pomp of the Divine service, the inner splendour of the Christian faith and life was quenched. The salt of the earth, which by its sharpness should keep the world from corruption, had lost its savour.

II.

Consider, in the second place, How the lost silver piece was found?

“What woman having ten pieces, when she hath lost one, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and search diligently until she find it?”

A search for the lost piece, a longing after evangelic truth, evangelic freedom, and evangelic peace, is to be traced in the darkest times in the Christian Church.

Many a godly mind painfully yearned; many a profound spirit made diligent investigation; many a courageous mouth testified with power; many an excellent heart bled with desire for the holy good of the Christian faith.

If the powers of darkness made haste to restrain such search; if they condemned a Wycliffe; if they hunted down the scattered people of the Waldenses; if they burned Huss at the stake, the yearning of the heart could not be bound with chains, or burned to ashes, or quenched in blood.

Ever more powerful grew the ardent desire of the soul, ever more universal the voice of longing, "Oh, that help would come out of Zion, and the Lord would redeem His imprisoned people! So would Jacob be joyous, and Israel be right glad." The help came, Hallelujah!

"The woman, when she seeks her lost piece, kindles a light."

The Church kindled its light so brightly that no malignant breath of man's mouth could blow it out; and with its safety lamp the miner's son, Martin Luther, descended into the obstructed shaft, in order, having cleared the way, to search and find the lost piece.

What a blessed light arose to him within the gloomy cloister walls of Erfurt, when he found God's word and read it, and there fell from his eyes, as it were, scales!

A blessed light from his work arose to many thousand blinded minds, to myriads of yearning hearts, when the pure word of God was again put upon the candlestick, when the long unused Bible resumed its place in the pulpits, in the schools, in the homes, in the heads and hearts of the people, and there resounded through the Church of the Lord, through cottages and palaces, the

quickenings call, "Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee."

To be sure, a light by which much chaos and dust came to view, and abuses of many centuries were swept away!

"The woman swept the house."

To that work Luther applied a strong arm and a smart besom, to wit, his powerful uncompromising voice. When he nailed his Ninety-five Theses against the abuses of indulgences on the church door of Wittenburg, when he burned the Pope's bull and pandects in a blazing fire before the gates of the same city, when he swept out the sinful trash from the corners of the cloisters, and abolished vain pomps in the ceremonial of the Church, his main work was accomplished.

Such sweeping is never without dust and noise. The wrangle of controversy, the bustle of the imperial Diet, the powder smoke of religious war, and so forth!

People have often bitterly accused the Reformation and its leaders, and laid on them the blame or crime of dissension and schism, the rending of the realm, the destruction of so many olden sanctuaries, the horror of civil and religious war.

But, if there be dust in sweeping, does the besom make it? Or, is it not already there before the besom stirs it up? If you wish to have a trim house on the Sunday, have you not to put up with dust on the Saturday?

When Moses led forth his people from slavery, was there not also dust, through all the plagues of Egypt, and the hardships of the desert?

When Elijah at Carmel shattered to pieces the altar of Baal, there was also dust, and blood flowed plenteously by the brook Kishon.

When Jesus purged the temple at Jerusalem, there was dust, and noise from the upset tables of the money changers, and the hurried stampede of the scared sellers of beasts for sacrifice.

When the heathen at Ephesus burned their old books of enchantment and divination at the feet of the apostle Paul, it did not happen without fume and smoke.

And to-day still when the Lord will turn in to a people, to a home, to a heart in order to renew it, He uses beforehand the besom of affliction. It comes not about without the storm of opposition. There is trouble and unrest. Much dust of old prejudices, much disorder of long-confirmed sin, must be swept out. You almost fancy it will be worse than before. But when amidst all the dust of your sins the lost silver piece comes to light, the long earnestly desired pearl of salvation sparkles in front of you, when you have found what you eagerly sought, peace with God, and all ill-humour is allayed, and your heart becomes a calm, pure, trim room, in which all is cleared up and set in order, in which God's grace is resplendent, God's peace breathes like a summer breeze, which on Sunday morning rustles through the lattice, do you then think of the dust? And if not merely to one heart, but to thousands, to millions the evangelic pearl be again bestowed, through the arduous struggles of men of God and storms of persecution, what remains for you to-day but humbly to rejoice and be thankful.

III.

Consider, in the third place, how you should rejoice!

"When the woman had found her silver piece, she called her friends and neighbours together," and said— "Rejoice with me."

Yes, so it rang out into the world loudly and clearly nearly four hundred years ago.

The light should not be hid under a bushel, but should give forth its splendour to all lands.

The recovered silver piece should not be a secret treasure of the priesthood, but a common good of Christendom.

The gospel peal should be heard in the palaces of kings, and re-echo in the cottages of the poor. The old man in grey hairs should hear it, and the child at school should receive its brightness into his little heart. The craftsman in his workshop, and the learned man in his study, the mother amongst her children, and the soldier in the mess-room, all should rejoice over it.

“Rejoice! I have found the lost coin.”

“Of that of which the heart is full the mouth overflows,” held good of Luther, pre-eminently as of many others.

Through all sermons he delivered, through all hymns which he composed, through all his published writings, through the contests he fought, there rings the apostolic fervour, which was like a fire in his bones, and suffered him not to be silent. There rings, too, the evangelic love which strongly urged him to pity the people who were languishing and scattered like sheep, which have no shepherd.

“Rejoice with me, for I have found the silver piece which I had lost.”

Yes, so called the rejuvenescent Church at that time loudly through all lands. The call found a re-echo in many thousand hearts everywhere.

To be sure, all did not rejoice with her.

There was the envious neighbour who would not

have you to value the found treasure, and bears a grudge toward you for it up to the present day.

Myriads of hearts and homes, whole lands, princes and peoples, however, received with joy the evangelic truth, and willingly hazarded property and life for it.

Christians of every age and condition, high and low, young and old, men and women, learned and ignorant, clerical and lay, were joyous of mind in the new sunshine of grace, like as when one experiences a golden morning dawn after a dark and stormy night.

Oh, beloved, it was a beautiful time when noble princes and godly peoples stood together in brotherly enthusiasm for truth and righteousness.

The storm which then passed was fruitful and destructive only of what was effete and noxious, to wit, the superstitions and idolatries of that time.

It was a holy Whitsuntide blast from above.

Oh, that a breath of that godly spirit were wafted over into the troubled atmosphere of our age, that it found a congenial echo in the Christendom of to-day, that over the interval of nearly four hundred years there rang again the call so heartily inviting, "Rejoice with me, for I have found the piece which I had lost!"

XLVIII.

The Design, End, and Duty of Christian Missions.

"Depart, for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles."

ACTS xxii. 21.

BELOVED, we would not to-day consider single incidents from the history of missions. We would rather place before your minds the work of missions generally in their entirety and greatness in order thereby to strengthen your courage of faith and of hope.

At all times the Church has carried on missions. If it were to intermit, it would be an evil sign of lifelessness in it. Going back to apostolic days, your look fixes on one who became the spiritual father of us all in Christ, and the pattern of all missionary activity, to wit, the apostle Paul. Since he freed the gospel from the bands of the law of Israel, it goes on in its freeness with speedy victorious march through the whole world.

Like a valiant hero in the holy war, he carried the banner of Jesus Christ from the east to the west, from Jerusalem to Rome. As the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, so St. Paul bore the bright gospel of his Lord from the one quarter to the other. We may, indeed, say of him what the psalmist says of the sun, "He goeth forth as a bridegroom from his chamber, and rejoiceth as a hero to run his race."

Thus the light of the gospel came to us in these western lands, and we desire to carry or help in carrying it to those who in the east still sit in darkness. Thus then let us consider mission work in the light of the pattern of St. Paul.

I.

The first point is the end which the Lord has set to His mission. When one goes on a journey he must first of all know the end of it. The mission, being the work which sets the gospel in progress in its course throughout the world, what is the end of this course? The end of missions is that all the corners of the earth belong to Christ.

Outside mission buildings you sometimes read, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." When the Lord took farewell of His disciples the purport of His commission was, "Make ye disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded."

Thus St. Paul shaped his course. From the first, Rome, the capital of the world, was the end of his evangelic effort, in order that thence the light might the better spread from this centre. At the beginning of his letter to the Romans he tells you that he had been "called to proclaim and establish obedience to the faith amongst all peoples." In another place of the same Epistle he says that "the fulness of the heathen should come into the Church of Christ," that is, the full number, the totality of peoples.

Such, beloved, is the end which the Lord has set to His mission. Not an end which you have chosen, but

which He has appointed, that all peoples should become Christian! It is meet and natural since Christ is the Lord of the whole earth, and sits at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in the heavens, that all be subject to Him, and all knees bow, not only those in heaven, and those under the earth, but those also upon the earth, and all peoples confess and sing praise to Him.

Christianity is a world religion, designed to penetrate all lands. To be sure, if it consisted mainly of outside customs, uses, ordinances, it might easily fall into conflict with the particular uses and other social regulations of peoples. For every people has its own customs. Christianity, however, is not such an outward thing, but a matter of the heart, so that all of whatever complexion or race, whatever their private or social habits or institutes, can adopt this faith and receive it in their hearts. Because its preaching is redolent of the heart of God, it addresses itself to the heart of man. Just as all men are sinners, and the love of God has value for all, and as they all need the salvation of God, so in Christ Jesus that salvation is provided for all, and so in the preaching of the righteousness of faith a way of salvation is opened up to all. The gospel is of the deepest import to all, and must pervade all. There cannot be rest until God's love in Christ conquer, and the circle of the earth lie at His feet.

It is something great that you are engaged in a work which should embrace the whole world, and may not rest until the ends of the earth become also the limits of the Church. It is a great thing that the eye of the Christian survey the whole earth, and his heart embrace all peoples.

There has been a time, when the friends of missions assembled in small back rooms, despised by others,

suspected by the civic authorities, when doubtful thoughts were entertained what it might be which gathered together men devoted to a King whom they called Christ. The hearts of those pietists, or enthusiasts, or the like, whatever others might in mockery call them, embraced all peoples. Their eye scanned all lands, and their mouth sang of Christ the King of the earth. They spoke to one another of the natives of the South Sea, of the negroes in Africa, of the Tamuls and other races of the Indies. Here, then, you see that a Christian has a perception and feeling for the whole world. The end of missions which the Lord has set is the conversion of the entire earth.

II.

From this point we can now look at another, to wit, the real work and task of missions. Surely, if all people should become Christian, it is the business of missions to make them so. The task consists not merely in missionaries going into a land and there making a stand upon the coast, or in going into a city and by preaching to gain over perhaps two or three souls, and then to say, "Now testimony is borne to this people also." You must proceed further. The mission wills not only to make some few souls believers, but to make the peoples in their entirety Christian.

For thus the Lord says, "The gospel should be preached to every creature." All should be made disciples. As at Pentecost the Spirit was poured out on the small band of apostles, and they spoke in all sorts of tongues, what did this speaking in diverse languages signify? What else than that the gospel should be preached in the speech of all peoples upon earth?

When the apostle Paul was chosen by the Lord to be His missionary to the Gentiles, did he peradventure think, "It is all one whether I go up to this village, or enter that town, if I can only make some souls saved and blessed?"

To be sure, a single soul is more worth than all the treasures of earth, but the Lord will not content Himself with some souls. The net must be widely cast forth in order to collect the greatest possible number of fishes. Thus then St. Paul did not go into remote places and scattered villages or hamlets. Oh no! He went into the capital cities, and at last to Rome, in order to raise as high as possible the light of the Gospel. The higher the candlestick stands, so much wider around the light shines, so many more can behold it and walk in its brightness.

Surely you must begin with single persons. But if the missionary win single souls, the next step is to form a Christian community and through the society thus formed to operate on others.

Wherefore did the Holy Ghost preach in different languages and not merely in one tongue? Because the mind of a people is best expressed in its own language. Thus the gospel should be preached in manifold tongues. It should speak to the heart after the manner of diverse peoples and so more directly touch their better feelings.

When St. Paul in Antioch of Pisidia spoke of God the Creator, who gives rain and fruitful seasons, and fills the heart with food and gladness, and then passed on to speak of Jesus Christ, he preached to the people as they were best able to understand. At Athens, again, he preached as was most suitable to the philosophers there. He thus changed his course to speak to every people in

the manner adapted to their cast of mind and association of thought.

Thus must also the missionaries of to-day make estimate of it. Thus must the gospel assume manifold form and language, according to the diversity of manners of the manifold races, and yet be to all the same comforting and joyous message of Jesus Christ the Saviour of sinners.

III.

Now as to the actual mission work abroad at the present time our missionaries have not, in the first place, to bring culture to uncivilized peoples. Indeed wherever the gospel is preached, it brings also culture and civilization with it, but that is an indirect salutary result or supplement of it, not the task itself. This consists in not imposing European customs upon foreign people, as if so many wonderful things might signify to what they have attained, when the natives clothe themselves like Europeans, or eat and drink in European fashion. Not to carry thither such manners as are usual amongst us. Oh no! but to leave to every people its own fashions and ways so far as they are agreeable to the Word of God. It is enough for them to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. All good will follow sound belief.

St. Paul says, in the beginning of his letter to the Romans, that he is called to introduce and establish obedience to the faith. He does not say obedience to Jewish or other law. It is not the work of the missionary to bring laws to the Tamuls and other heathen peoples. You are no right Christians, indeed, if you do

not set up amongst them whatever of excellence your civilization carries with it, but your preaching must first of all be, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." To establish this obedience of faith is the work of your missionaries.

In Colosse there was a Christian, Philemon by name, who had a slave. This slave, who was called Onesimus, ran away from his master and came to Rome. He fell in with St. Paul there, was converted and baptized. The apostle sent him back with a letter to Philemon, in which he desired nothing else but that he should receive him in a friendly manner as a brother in Christ.

You must say, "Slavery is unchristian, and it is a disgrace that there is still slavery amongst Christians." Notwithstanding, St. Paul did not write to Philemon, "Slavery is unchristian, and you must set the slave free," but he sends to him the slave and exhorts him, that he should not make him suffer, but rejoice that he has gained in the person of his slave a Christian brother. The apostle thus will not abolish slavery by a law, since he is not sent to give laws but to preach the gospel, and establish the obedience of faith.

Christianity of itself has had the result, that slavery disappears in due course. Thus also you may entertain the comfortable faith and confidence that the power of the gospel, if it only once have won and conquered the heart, will overcome and throw to ground the immoral and unchristian uses and ordinances, and maxims with which foreign people are conversant.

To be sure, every life needs customs and ordinances. If you plant a vineyard, you must bring rods and espaliers round which the vine may twine. But the principal matter is the vine itself. Upon the stakes and espaliers there never grow clusters. The Lord, who

purposes one day to come, will seek fruit, and ask after the vine, not after the espaliers.

What does it avail to contend and be at variance whether you should adhere to outer ordinances of this sort or of that, which are indeed the props and espaliers of the Christian life? To establish the obedience of faith is the work of the gospel. But the centre of the gospel is the Cross of Christ. To preach His Cross, to set it up on the high places of the land, before the eyes of heathen peoples, is the work with which the Lord has commissioned your missionaries, and which He will richly bless.

IV.

We would, in conclusion, say a few words of the right missionary spirit, and first of humility. You should not suppose that you do anything remarkable when you concern yourselves in the work of missions. As the Lord enjoins, there is no question whether the Church will or will not. If missions be obligatory, each person must contribute his part without the smallest thought of merit. Seeing you belong to the great family of nations, what more natural than for the Christian to say, "How happy we should be if all the others had the same comfort in life and death!" The thought will leave you no rest. You must make the others sharers of it.

Besides the spirit of humility, of soberness, of perseverance, there is that of tranquillity and patient waiting—that you should not always expect to hear something new or startling. A thousand years may go so quietly away that no more appears to happen in them than in a

single day ; and, contrariwise, often more will happen in a single day than can in a thousand years.

But you should not only be free from inordinate longing after spiritual excitement, and the gratification of an artificially stimulated curiosity, but exempt also from the spirit of criticism in these matters, since that is one other failing into which you can easily be betrayed.

Let me relate a story from heathen times. The Romans, as you know, carried on many wars, and thus they were once engaged in a war with a Macedonian king named Perseus. He had already beaten many Roman generals with their armies, so that the Romans were ashamed at having suffered so many reverses. They therefore looked around them for a general who was more experienced in military affairs, and had already conducted successful campaigns, and stood in high authority with all. So they selected a certain Æmelius Paulus, an old man who a long time before had retired from public life. They required him to take the superior command. He stepped before the great assembly and spake thus to them : He would willingly do what they desired of him, in dependence on the gracious help of the gods. He would endeavour to discharge his responsibility, and when he returned home he would give an account of his actions. But he must require something for himself. Under a twofold condition would he go to the war. First, that they would receive no other intelligence than what he sent to them. He would inform them of everything necessary conformable to truth. But they should receive no other intelligence which might easily mislead. They should, in the mean time, abstain from all criticism and talk. He who wished to give good counsel might go with him. Then he would willingly receive good counsel. But he who wished to

remain at home should also keep his good counsel to himself. Such counsel could be in nothing helpful to him. For the result of criticism is only that zeal is damped and enthusiasm for the time cooled. This, then, the Romans promised. He marched off, beat King Perseus, and returned home as victor. Similarly it is here also. Failures there are abroad and at home. But if you perform your duty, and act according to your best knowledge and conscience, then you may be confident that the Lord will make good your failings, which result from ignorance. But what does it help to criticize and wish to know better what has happened? It serves for nothing.

V.

The last feature of the missionary spirit is that you help with that whereby you all can be serviceable, namely, prayer. May the Lord send to you richly the spirit of prayer. You must still say that it is a sin and shame that you have so cold a heart for missions.

If your earthly goods be threatened, you can wax warm. Your heart may be vehemently moved. And there without stands the Captain of your salvation, with the banner of the Cross in hand, and He storms against the citadel of Satan, and your fellow-brothers run and join in the assault with Him, and you the while sit at home, cold and dead and sleepy of heart, and think perhaps sometimes of the missionaries abroad, and may occasionally take their battle upon your lips in prayer, instead of day and night prosecuting in your thoughts these great matters of the kingdom of God.

Beloved, your hearts should be moved, and leave you no rest until you storm heaven with prayer, that the

Lord would at last rend those dark clouds which so obscure the view of those heathen peoples that they cannot behold the glory of the grace of God in Christ, nor turn themselves to the Cross, that so the light of eternal life may shine on them.

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